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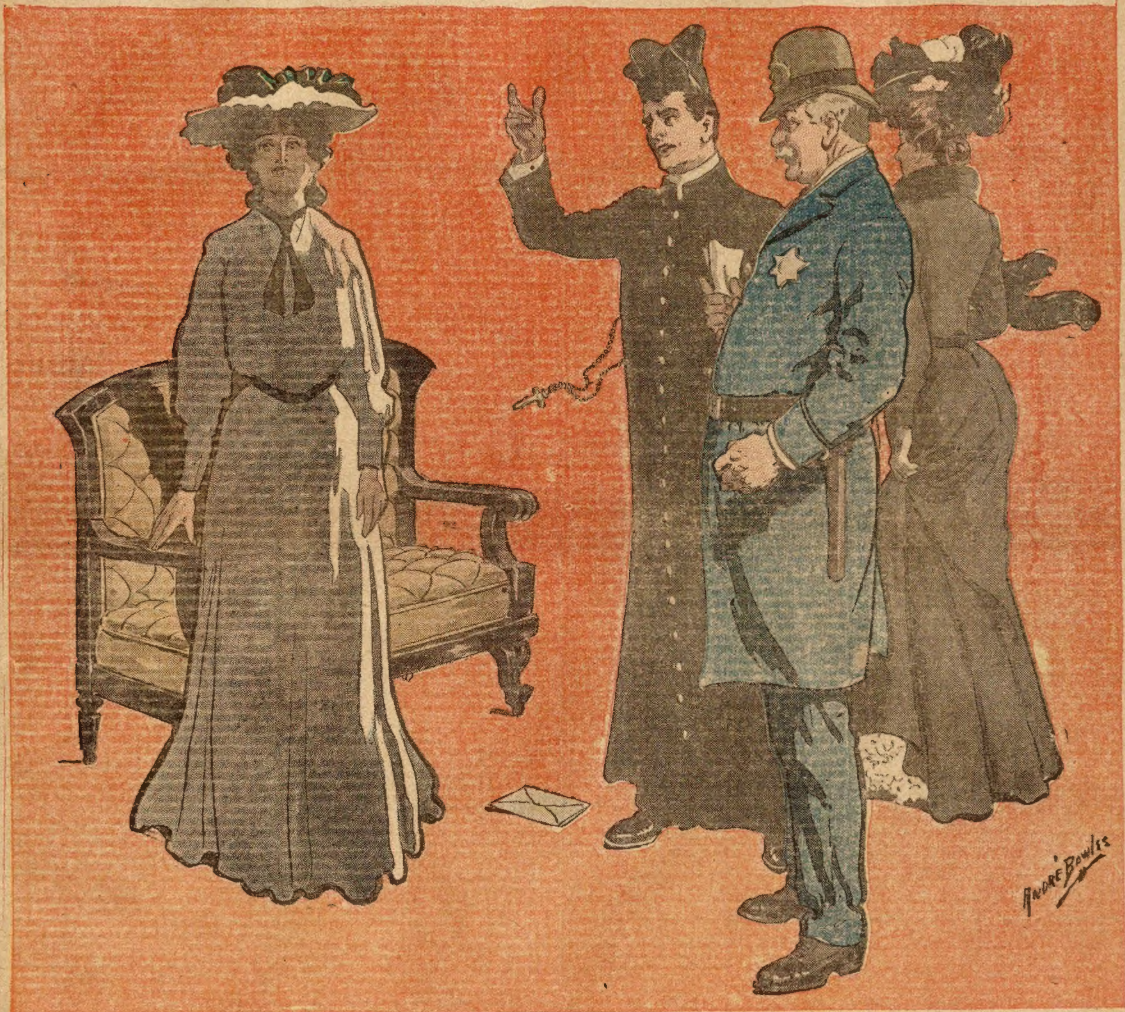

The Damnation of Father Fitzgerald.

By Helena Ballard White.

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CHAPTER I.

"What is all the excitement about?" questioned a young priest, as he passed hurriedly down the steps of the parish house in his robe and looked anxiously into the faces of the turbulent crowd of schoolgirls.

"Mercedes Maturin has drowned herself!" exclaimed one.

"My God!" burst from the white lips of the priest. He staggered like a drunken man and leaned against the post of the steps for support.

"Look, they are bringing her now—there they come from the lake with her, father!" cried his informant.

Turning and looking in the direction that she pointed he saw four men coming toward him bearing a stretcher, while a wild throng of boys and girls, with a few adults, followed or crowded close to catch a glimpse of the dripping form that lay uncovered upon the bier.

"There must be some mistake! It cannot, it cannot be—Mercedes!" gasped the priest, his face blanching whiter still, as he looked upon the scene.

"Yes, it is Mercedes Maturin and she did it on purpose, because——"

Not waiting to hear the rest the priest hurried on, bareheaded, half-way down the block to meet the sad procession.

One glance at the dead and he turned away with a stifled groan.

There was no mistaking the perfect features that were upturned to the broad light of day; there was no mistaking the wealth of golden hair that streamed, dripping and gleaming in the shadowless sun; there was no mistaking the little white hand that fell limp from the bier. Yes, it was Mercedes—the beautiful Mercedes Maturin, the pride and pet of the school and parish.

Recovering himself, the young father ordered the men to carry their burden into the house, then, quietly dispersing the crowd, slowly passed up the steps and closed the door behind him.

After listening to the tragic tale of self-destruction and giving a few instructions as to the disposal of the remains, the priest hurried to his chamber and closeted himself within.

Night had fallen ere he emerged. Learning that the unfortunate girl had been prepared for burial and borne to the church chapel, he went at once to look upon the remains.

As he stepped within the dimly lighted place he glanced at the casket then upon the two nuns who knelt in prayer. They arose upon seeing who it was that came into their presence, and after a few whispered words, passed out and left the priest alone with the dead.

He went at once and leaned over the uncovered casket, gazing long and steadfastly upon the flower-covered corpse. The little hands were as white, as wax-like and as perfect of mould as the lilies which they held. The flower-like face turned up to his own, rivaled in its loveliness and its purity the roses that clustered against its coldness.

At last he fell upon his knees beside the coffin with a groan, the anguish of which might have rent the heart of any listener. He remained silent for some time, then rose and looked again into the cold, beautiful face of the dead.

His nails clenched deep into his flesh with suppressed inward agony. The fine features of his pallid, haggard face, contracted painfully, and took on lines of still deeper suffering.

"Almighty and merciful God," he began, then broke off. "There is no God! There is no God in Heaven or earth! The Bible is false—my teachings have been false—false as hell! It killed you, my poor darling! This cant, this creed, this rot! I chose between—I cast you, a living, suffering soul aside for a few cobwebs strung by fanatics—by diseased and fanciful brains! For the sake of cherishing and keeping alive a myth, I sacrificed you—your life—your soul, and broke your young heart! Christ, why did I do it? I was insane to have done this thing. Why did I not listen to my convictions instead of that of others? Nature's laws, not men's, are the laws to follow. Nature whispered, take her to your heart. My religious vows demanded that I put her out of it. Nature said, be a man. The priesthood said, be a craven. And so I turned from the still, small voice and the whisperings of love and listened to that of mendacity. Your life has had to pay for it. Your life, my dear one, is the price I have to pay for in sticking to the cloister—to these rags!" In a rage he rent the robe which he wore with frenzied and powerful fingers, and flung it from him. Then he fell upon the corpse, raining his tears and his kisses on the marble face and the impassive lips. All the longing and despair that had filled his heart for months he now vented in tones of awful misery:

"Oh, my angel, my queen, my beauty, my love, I have killed, I have murdered you! Poor, sad, little aching heart—how I have crushed it! If thou canst forgive me, God, for aiding in this crime, it is more than I can forgive myself! Why did you permit the sacrifice? You, too, were an accomplice! But rubbish! Here I go railing and ranting at some indefinable, incomprehensible being—shouldering my sins upon a myth! It is all the result of false doctrine, and my own cursed, witless brain! There is no personal God. God means something higher, wider, grander, if it means anything at all. God means nature and nature means God. Nature would not have betrayed me. Nature makes no mistakes. From this hour on I am through with creeds, with dogmatism and myths—with the teachings of false prophets. From now on I shall set myself about revealing the truth. Teaching men and women to worship the true God Nature. If the world must worship let it worship wisely. Speaking through this medium, Nature, the Almighty God did all he knew and could to make me see and take the right path. He gave unto me his most precious gift—love. I spurned it—I cast it from me, while my heart cried out against it. It is a thing which I cannot resurrect. But I can bury with it these things that have played me false. I bury my faith, my so-called faith with you, my darling; yes, and my priest's robe! It, too, shall be buried with you. It has proven your shroud and so it shall be!'

Now raising the corpse in an upright position he did a strange thing. In his madness, his insanity of grief, he snatched up the black robe from the floor where he had tossed it and wound it tenderly about her body.

"This is the befitting burial robe for you, my angel! This, this rag that came between us—that blasted your young life! This is the shroud that must go to the grave with you! If I must bury you, so shall I bury all that has been the cause of your death!"

Putting his arms about her, wild with remorse and longing, he now crushed the inanimate form to his breast with all the intensity of his nature, fondly caressing the cold little face and talking to her as though she were a livnig thing. He pressed his lips upon hers, breathing his very life into hers.

"Mercedes, Mercedes, my Mercedes, my angel, my love! open your eyes and look at me! Look at me, Mercedes! You are not dead! I cannot give you up; Mercedes, in the name of God, come back, come back to me!"

Was it love that answered? Love that brought her back to life? or did the wild, impassioned cry that broke upon the quiet of the holy place, reach some last lingering spark of vitality and stir it to activity once again? Had she only been lying in a swoon, or was it a miracle?

This question the priest was never enabled to answer. But the blue ayes opened, the pale lips wreathed in a strange smile, and warmth and life came slowly creeping back into the chilled veins as he held her thus.

"Great God!" gasped the man in a hollow voice, then fell senseless to the floor, the girl clasped in his arms, and the coffin rattling after them.

"Where am I, Fabian? Where am I? What does all this mean?" cried the frightened girl in a weak, trembling voice.

Releasing herself from his hold she gave a quick glance around, followed by a little terrified shriek. Then as memory came surging back to her dulled senses, cried out:

"I know—I remember—I threw myself in the lake! I was in my coffin! I was to have been buried! He came to me—he cared, yes, he cared! He loves me, he loves me still! Oh, Fabian, Fabian, speak to me—to your Mercedes," she cried, now shaking and kissing him by turns. "I live! I live! Fabian."

After a few moments his faculties being restored, the dazed man sat up and folded his arms about her again.

"You live, yes, you live! What a miracle! God be praised! God is good—how good God is! The God of Nature heard my cry and answered it!"

After a long embrace in which the tears of both were mingled he continued:

"Oh, but why did you do it, why did you do it, little one?"

He now raised and seated her on the altar steps then dropped down beside her. "Why did you do it, little one?"

He was in a cold perspiration and commenced vigorously to mop his face and hands.

"You know, you must know, Fabian, why I did it. You renounced my love. I could not, could not live and face the sorrow."

"But that was wrong. I had the same sorrow to face, but I did not think of destroying myself on that account, Mercedes."

"But, Fabian, my love is stronger, is greater than your own, else you would have made the sacrifice. You would have given up the priesthood."

"No, my darling, I cannot agree with you."

"Oh, I only wish I might prove it to you. I only wish there were some great sacrifice which you might ask of me as I have asked of you—yes, one far greater."

"You would have sacrificed your life for your love, Mercedes. I, too, would gladly do this if I thought it would help to mend matters, if I thought it would make you happier, or lighten your heart in any way. But knowing that it could not, I should reason that it would be selfish of me to cause you the anguish of looking upon my dead face. Oh, Mercedes, Oh, God! how I suffered! I blashphemed everything that I ever held sacred, Mercedes. When I looked into your white face and kissed the speechless lips it seemed my heart and my brain must burst their confines. Why, why did you do it? Mercedes, Oh, Mercedes, how you have made me suffer!"

"I am sorry, so sorry, Fabian. But have you no thought of the feelings that must have led up to such an act? It was simply too much to ask of me to live on without you, Fabian, without your love. Fabian, how is it now to be? You won't again ask this of me? Fabian, you won't ask me to give you up, to forget you? You won't go away? You won't leave me?" she sweetly pleaded.

"Let us at this moment rejoice and leave the tomorrow to take care of itself while we enjoy the Heaven-born bliss of being and loving once again! Oh, my Mercedes, my life, my soul, how happy I am at this moment, God alone knows!"

But the woman in her still persisted:

"I must know, Fabian, I must know this night of your choice. Shall it be me or the church? Fabian, are you going to leave me?"

Before he could answer they were startled by steps in the outer hall and sprang quickly to their feet. They had no sooner done so than the two nuns who had been appointed to remain with the corpse stepped inside the chapel.

The scene upon which they looked, the girl, the supposed dead, standing beside the priest in her grave clothes with his black robe tied about her and trailing upon the floor, the flowers strewn about, and the empty coffin turned on its side, caused the two nuns to let go a shriek and turn to flee from the sight of it all.

"Come back, come back, Sister Clarice! Do not be alarmed, come back and let me explain!" called the priest, starting after them.

"She was not dead—I—I—that is, I thought so—I thought she was not, and, of course, set about resuscitating her."

As the first shock of their fright passed away, the sisters now hurried forward and clasped the trembling girl in their arms, mingling and murmuring their thanks and praises that she had been so miraculously saved.

"But why did you do it, child? What was troubling you that you could not tell us?" questioned Sister Clarice, looking earnestly into the face of the bewildered girl.

"I have made my confession to the father," at last faltered Mercedes.

"Imaginary trouble, I assure you. She has atoned and will never again be so foolish, sister," the priest hastened to say.

"We thought perhaps it was because you failed to pass in your examinations of late, Mercedes. Do not let ambition carry you too far. Of course this being your first year of failure, it is a bit hard. But, my dear child, what does that amount to? You must take a broader view of life."

"Yes, you must take a broader view of life, Mercedes," echoed the priest.

She glanced up quickly and looked questioningly into his face. She had heard these same words fall from his lips before. The look of happiness that had held her features was now replaced by that of pain and fear.

He looked away, then into her face again. Reading her thoughts he said:

"Happier things are in store for Mercedes. She must not be foolish. She must trust hope a little further than she has been doing."

At these reassuring words the young girl looked up into his face with a grateful, loving glance, then blushed and turned away.

As she did so the priest for the first time thought of his shirt sleeves and his torn gown twisted and trailing about her. He observed, too, that the sisters were looking first upon the robe and then upon himself.

Searching his mind for some subterfuge he said amid some confusion:

"I was about to take her over to the house and fearing that the white gown might attract attention wrapped my robe about her."

"Very thoughtful of you," replied Sister Clarice. "But we had better go now and acquaint the others with this strange, this glorious news. And you, dear child, must be put to bed. Come, can you walk or shall Father Fitzgerald carry you?"

"Oh, I feel quite strong—very strong indeed. I can easily walk, since it is but a few steps next door," replied Mercedes. "Nothing is troubling me but the remorse for my rash act. I cannot be happy again, dear sisters, until I have had your forgiveness and that of the church and school. They will think me very wicked."

"We shall talk of this at another time, Mercedes. Of course you have our forgiveness, but come, you must ask that of Sister Agnes. Her grief is terrible," said Sister Claudia, as they walked down the aisle.

"I will remain and put the chapel in order," said the priest as they turned to go. "And, Mercedes, I would have a word with you alone."

As she came back, the nuns passed on to the door and stood waiting for her in respectful silence.

"Be in the studio by nine o'clock tomorrow evening," he whispered.

"I shall be there—I must know my fate,' murmured Mercedes. "Do not fail me, Fabian! Oh, Fabian, Fabian, how I love you!" she concluded, then turned to follow the nuns.

CHAPTER II.

Mercedes Maturin was orphaned when a mere babe. Her young mother, when dying, had placed her in the arms of her trusted friend, Agnes Fitzgerald, a sister of the priest, requesting her to bring the babe up as her own. Out of the fortune left by Mercedes' mother the foster mother was to be liberally rewarded for the care of her young charge.

So it came that Mercedes was taken to live in the house of her guardian. Fabian Fitzgerald was then but a boy of ten. A few years later he went abroad to be educated for the priesthood. He did not see Mercedes again until a few months before this tragic affair, which came near ending her life.

Having finished his studies and entered the priesthood, he returned to his old home and neighborhood to preside over the church in that parish, and Mercedes, with his sister Agnes, went to the priest's house to live with him and two elderly fathers. The church and school where the young girl received her religious instruction and her education were next door.

When Fabian Fitzgerald first beheld his sister's ward in all the youth and bloom and beauty of her seventeen summers, his eyes at once looked love to eyes that answered in full measure and meaning.

Well understanding his position before the world he fought desperately against the acknowledgement of this passion. Seeing that he avoided her as best he could, Mercedes understood the reason or thought she did. She, too, must clip the wings of the little white god that he bare no tales of the love and anguish that were eating out her young heart.

Her joyous laugh with its sweet contagion soon lost all its music, her eyes their sparkle. They had now a look in them as sad as death. She became neglectful of her church duties, also of her studies. She seemed suddenly to lose all interest in life and everything about her.

All observed and wondered. Her good foster mother, becoming alarmed, sent for the physician. She also confided her fears to her brother, the priest. Something seemed to be sapping out the girl's young life, slowly but surely, sapping it away. She had some secret sorrow. It was not right that she should bear it alone, neither was it right for her to avoid the confessional as she did. Fabian should seek her and learn the reason of her trouble and the neglect of her church duties, so his sister advised.

"I suppose it is my duty as a priest to see that she does not neglect her duties, as you say," he answered. "I will attend to this."

As he turned away his brow knit into troubled lines. "Yes, it is my duty," he told himself, "as much as I shrink from it. I may be wrong. My suspicions may be unfounded. It may not be the constant struggle with love and fate that I am having which has so changed her. It may be some outside force which I do not know about. At any rate I must learn what it is. Matters cannot go on in this way."

Arriving at this decision, he sought her one evening in the garden back of the parish house.

As he came upon her she looked up frightened and turned to go.

"Mercedes," he called and she returned.

"You are not doing right to remain away from the confessional," he said, avoiding her eyes.

"No, father," she gasped.

"I shall expect you in the morning."

"Oh, father!"

"You will be there?"

"I—I cannot come. Don't ask it," she pleaded.

"I shall expect you. Do not fail to be there," he said somewhat sternly, then turned and walked away.

When he had gone, the young girl sank upon the garden bench and sobbed out her sorrow and her secret to the night, praying that divine intervention might save her from so trying an ordeal.

"I cannot face him with this," she moaned. "He must know and so avoids me. He has guessed already that which I would hide from him and the world, and so scorns me for it. No, I cannot, I cannot confirm his suspicions. I will not go—he does wrong to compel me—knowing, so well knowing."

Fabian Fitzgerald was greatly surprised when morning came and went and did not bring the truant to the confessional as he had commanded.

He was busy during the day and saw nothing of her, but when night had fallen he again went in quest of her. It was as late as nine o'clock when he finally thought to look in the schoolroom. Using the underground passage from the parish house through the church to the school, he looked in the lower rooms then ascended the steps to the studio above.

There he found her lying full length on the carpeted floor.

Hearing a step she started up and sprang quickly to her feet. A lamp, turned low on the desk where she had been at work, showed her who the intruder was.

"You!" she cried out, her eyes having the look in them of a wounded stag at bay.

"Yes, it is I," he answered very quietly and gently, "what is there about me, Mercedes, that you should so fear?"

"You have come to reproach me for not being at confession this morning.'

"I have come to ask the reason why you were——"

"But you must not—I beg you, father, do not ask," she pleaded, not lifting her eyes from the floor.

"It is my duty as a priest—as your priest."

"Let me confess to another," she still pleaded.

"And why not to me, Mercedes?"

"Oh, I cannot say—I—oh—oh, don't force me to answer this question, father; let me go! I must go, I cannot——"

"You might as well tell me all about what is troubling you, Mercedes, and have it over. It were wiser to confess to me. Perhaps I can advise you better than another," he said, now tenderly stroking her head. "Are you ill in any way?"

"No, no, not that."

"Something is preying on your mind—this I can see. Come, tell me what it is that——"

"Please, father, do not ask me—I—I will get over it—I will put it from mind."

"Mercedes should I guess your secret will you confess it?" he asked, taking her hand between his own.

"I would rather not."

"You are not in love, are you?" he asked, dropping her hand.

She glanced up quickly with a startled look and searched his face for a moment, then blushing turned away without answering.

"You must answer me, Mercedes."

"I—I cannot.'

"I must know—you must tell me,' he said a bit sternly.

"Oh, it is hard, so hard,' she cried, now covering her face with her hands.

"I have guessed your secret, Mercedes?"

"Yes—yes, father."

"And who is this one whom you——"

"Oh!" she gasped.

"Can't you tell me, Mercedes?"

"That—that I—I cannot tell—I must not tell, father."

"Should I guess again will you acknowledge, Mercedes?"

Again she looked up and searched his face with her wonderful eyes in a frightened, mystified way, then, as the expression changed and they were filled with the love that was consuming her vitality, she let them fall from his gaze.

How glorious they looked in the semi-darkness, thought the priest, as he stood before her. What a wonderful tale they told. Then the man, the human in him, asserted itself, and, taking her hand in a tight, warm grasp, he said:

"Mercedes, am I the one who is responsible for your—your unhappiness? Am I—"

"You know—you know," she cried, withdrawing her hand and clapping both to her eyes.

"You do love me, then, Mercedes? Tell me it is true that you love me?" he now pleaded, his vows of faith swept away in a torrent of manly passion.

"You do not spurn it?" she questioned with a worshiping glance.

For answer he gently folded his arms about her and pressed her to his hungry heart, forgetting all save his momentary bliss. Holding her so, he kissed again and again the willing lips.

Many sweet, stolen moments were passed in this same place as the next few months flew by and Mercedes recovered all her lost happiness and spirit.

Then came the final scene that influenced her to attempt to take her life.

He must give her up, so he told her. He must put her out of his life. He had thought it all over and out and it was the only thing to do. He never expected to be called upon to do a thing so hard when taking his vows. It was unfortunate for both that they were so bound by fate. He had decided to go abroad for a year or so. In that time they must conquer their love one for the other. He would leave on the evening of the next day, he informed her.

It was in the afternoon of this same day that Mercedes walked down to the lake, a few blocks away, and threw herself on its wide, quiet bosom.

An officer who was detailed to look after the small boys who went swimming in that vicinity, saw and rescued her.

Now it had come to them to once again take up their quarrel with fate. There was something which she could not understand. She felt that there was somethnig which he did not explain to her. Of course, it was a sin for him to sacrifice his vows of faith with the church, but she argued there must be reasons aside from this which he had kept from her. He had hinted at as much, but refused to give her any satisfaction when she questioned him.

The day following her recovery she was the object of untiring interest. All kinds and classes thronged the parish house to look upon the one who had passed through so novel an experience.

Mercedes was glad when night had fallen and she could be alone with her thoughts. As the hour for the appointment with her lover approached, she stole from the house to their trysting place with a heart that fluttered so hard it almost stopped her breathing.

Opening the studio door she stepped softly within. He was not there. What if he did not come? What if, after all, he had decided that the church meant more to him than her love?

She dropped into a chair faint with fear and doubt. Suddenly her quick ear caught the sound of his footfall and, springing up, she threw herself into his outstretched arms.

"What hours, and days, and weeks, and months it has seemed since last night, my angel," he said as he released her. "But soon our partings will be over for all time. Mercedes, I learned last night as you lay before me apparently dead, what priceless love I had sacrificed. To see you so put all thought of clinging to the cloister forever from my mind. I——"

"Oh, Fabian, Fabian, how happy you have made me!" she cried, now weeping for sheer joy.

"Tomorrow I shall have a talk with the fathers," he went on, "and then—listen, did I hear a step?"

They stood quiet for some moments to learn if he were right, then reassured, he went on:

"After that, after I have made arrangements to sever my connections with the church, I shall continue my preparation for the trip abroad, and Mercedes, my darling, you must be ready to accompany me as my bride—my little wife, Mercedes.'

"Oh, Fabian, Fabian, what joy!"

"It will take probably two or three weeks to get matters so arranged that I can leave. I shall want to remain a year or so and——"

"Fabian, after all our woes it seems too good to be true! Am I not dreaming? Thank Heaven for this happiness! And—and you no longer regret, Fabian, that for poor, simple me, you must renounce your—

"I would there were more to lay at the feet of love as a sacrifice, my angel. Love shall henceforth claim its own. I feel that I do right in renouncing and denouncing everything that stands between. Indeed, there is no regret. So, Mercedes, my love, in a very short time now we shall have done with care and worry and secrecy. We shall be bound together by the holiest of vows and live to love, and love to live!"

"That you never shall!" whispered a woman's voice outside the swinging doors, as she turned and slipped noiselessly away.

CHAPTER III.

On the following evening at dusk, Fabian Fitzgerald was handed a message that caused a frown to settle on his handsome features. It read:

"Come to me this night. I must see you even though it be for the last time. I have a confession to make. Come about nine o'clock. EDITH."

"What can she want?" he angrily exclaimed, twisting the message and tossing it into a waste-basket. "The pursuing jade! Will she never let me alone? Well, I suppose I must go—I had better go and have it over with. Always the last time, and yet it never is. I wonder if she really has something to confess or if this is merely a ruse on her part to see me. What a fool I was to be led on by her intrigues and get myself in this tangle! How I have hated myself for yielding to her unwomanly advances and blandishments, and giving her this rod to hold over my head for the rest of my days. Yes, I have been a fool to permit her to lead me on in this way against my better judgment!"

It was with such thoughts as these that the appointed hour found the young priest passing up the steps of a red brick house in the street just back of the church.

He found her alone in the dimly lighted parlor.

"So you came?" she said, as he stepped into the room. "There, do not look so sheepishly about, it doesn't become a priest, and besides, there is no one else on the premises. Brother left again for the West today and I sent the maid on an errand to the North Side. She will not return until late."

"Why all this explanation? It matters not to me who is here or who isn't."

"Oh, pardon, I thought it might. I feared you would be displeased should any one find you out—learn that you had been calling."

"Well, it might prove annoying in a sense."

"You have always given me to understand that it might prove nothing less than your utter damnation, to be seen making love to a woman——"

"I still think so, were I really making love to one.'

"How right you are! I never knew before last night how right you were about this," she answered with a knowing, tantalizing smile.

"Well, well," he said impatiently, "what his this to do with your message?"

"Everything!"

"Explain," he answered with a mystified expression, as he threw his overcoat across a chair and seated himself some distance from her.

She immediately changed her seat, taking a chair next to the one that held the coat.

"Oh, don't be alarmed, I am not going to throw myself at your feet. I have already thrown myself at your head, I will confess, but it does not follow that I am going to fetch up at your feet," she laughed derisively. "The time has come for honesty between you and me."

"It has always been so," he answered hotly. "I have always been honest with you, Edith. I have repeatedly told you that I am bound by my vows of faith and so cannot be bound to any woman."

"Your faith to me was pledged before you gave it elsewhere. When I met you abroad several years ago, you were not slow in making advances and——"

"Meeting them, you mean."

"Have it your way, coward!"

"I shall not listen to this," he said rising.

"I say you shall—I shall force you to hear what I have to say, Fabian Fitzgerald. Be seated."

"Well, out with it then, I am losing my temper."

"I should hate to find it," she laughed. "Well," she continued, slyly twisting a button from the coat on the chair, "as I said, you pledged your faith to me before you pledged it elsewhere."

"Rubbish! that was but a college boy's foolishness. I had seen nothing of the world and less of women. You not only encouraged me in every way but haunted my footsteps. I passed some idle hours in your society. You led me to believe that the attention which I had paid you compromised you in the eyes of your friends. Being young and sappy, I fell into your trap and promised to marry you—you, who were several years my senior and had spent years with the world for your playground and men for your puppets. When I decided to enter the priesthood I came and told you that I could not marry you. You have since dogged my steps until at times I have found existence hateful."

"Let me ask a question: Is it only your vows of faith that now keep you from marrying me?"

"No, by the eternals, no! I wouldn't marry you if I were a thousand times free and had as many wives to choose as Solomon. I must confess that had I never met you I might not have become a priest. I was so disgusted with women, holding you as a standard, that I was glad to go where they could not follow.

"Oh, then I am to understand that you are using your priest's robe as a protection against women, and the church to dodge into when you chance on one who displeases you. When disappointed in love, you hie yourself to the sanctuary until attracted by some new face, then you cast off your faith with your robes and say ta-ta to the fathers. Dear me, this is amusing! I am a bit curious to know who in the end will win the prize, the church or some folish woman. You are——"

"How shameless of you to talk in such a manner. Women like yourself would make priests of every man in the country. Your immodest advances——"

"That will do, sir! That is always the way with a libertine when he has done amusing himself with a woman. Then it is she who has made all the advances. Oh, I understand you men. But we are drifting. I wrote you that I had a confession to make."

"Well, I am listening."

"So did I, last evening at the door of the schoolroom studio. This is my confession. I listened—I heard you promise to wed another, and——"

"Zounds, woman, I could throttle you, I could kill you," cried the young priest, springing quickly to his feet.

"Yes, I believe you fully capable, but I prefer to live on for a time, long enough at least, to mete out your punishment for this desertion, this trickery and unfaith. You behold a woman scorned! Know, reverened sir, I am of the sort that will avenge a wrong. I say you shall never marry Mercedes Maturin—the weak little fool who tried to drown herself because of a man's unfaith. She will know better some day. She will learn that no man is worth the smallest sacrifice. She thinks you a god, no doubt. She will waken one day to find that she has classed you wrong. She will be obliged to drop you from the dizzy heights of Olympia down to the jaws of Jupiter—just as I have done. Yes, just as I have done!"

He rose and turned impatiently away. She took him by the sleeve.

"Listen while you may! I repeat, the promise which you made to that—that child, you shall never keep—hark, is some one moving in the next room?" She stepped to the door then returned and said, "Just Norah turning down the light. I thought that she had gone."

"Who is to prevent my keeping my promise to marry her?" he asked as the woman faced him again.

"I, Edith Burke, at your service, sir."

"How can you prevent it?"

"That is my secret. I must acknowledge," she went on recklessly, "to having lain awake the whole night through thinking—thinking how I should stop this marriage and at the same time punish you for your unfaith to me. Since you refuse to marry me, I promise you, you shall not marry another. Last night I formulated my plans. Today I prepared to carry them out."

"If you do her any harm or cause her any grief, I shall kill you, woman!"

"Oh, rest assured I shall not harm the innocent further than to keep her from becoming your wife. That would be really a Christian act. The guilty is whom I believe in punishing. I have nothing against the girl, and assure you that I wish her no harm. She—she—that is, she may suffer a little for the time being, but when she realizes your unworthiness she will congratulate herself upon her narrow escape."

"So your method is to denounce me to the church and brotherhood? Well, woman, do your worst!"

"You defy me?"

"Do your worst!" he repeated sharply, and putting his hand on the knob swung through the door.

"You shall be made to realize that I have followed your instructions," she called, as he hurried down the steps.

"Lord, give me forty evil men instead of one evil woman to deal with," muttered the priest as he hurried along." I think it will result in nothing more than threats, however. I have listened to these constantly ever since I entered the priesthood—all the result of youthful recklessness. Well, it matters little now what she may tell the fathers since I have fully made up my mind to leave them; still, I would not have them misjudge me. I should like to hold their respect."

He was about to enter the parish house when his steps were arrested by the sound of fire engines tearing down the boulevard. He paused to learn if the fire were in the immediate neighborhood, but upon seeing the engines turn the corner concluded that it was not, and hurried within, going directly to his room.

He had removed his street coat and was about to put on a robe when his sister burst into the room.

"Fabian, there is a fire just back of us. It seems to be Burke's house that is burning. Come, let us go see."

It was in a bewildered frame of mind that the priest again donned his street clothes, and with his sister and Mercedes, repaired to the scene of the fire.

"What does this mean?" he asked himself. "Has she turned over a lamp or—or—what? She is a desperate and dangerous woman—no telling what she might do."

A few moments later he stood watching the firemen in their efforts to control the flames that shot through the windows of the upper floor, when his ear caught the following conversation passing between some women standing near:

"The family must be greatly alarmed," said one. "All are away from home," said the other, "they tell me that no one is in the house."

As Fabian listened he said to himself, "She must have left just after I did. I wonder how it happened."

Scarcely had the thought passed his mind when an excited cry burst from the crowd that had gathered to watch the flames. He pressed forward to learn the cause.

"They are carrying a woman out; it must be Miss Burke; they say she is dead, horribly burned," was the answer to his inquiry.

It was all too true, he learned later on. Edith Burke, the woman with whom he had just quarreled, was found in her bed burned almost beyond recognition. When it was learned that the blaze started in the room where she lay, and the bed and floor were saturated with kerosene, suicide was at once hinted at.

Learning what he could of the details of the girl's desperate deed, Fabian Fitzgerald with a heavy heart left the scene and hurried back to the parish house where he sat until a late hour talking over the affair with other members of the family.

He spent a restless night, his mind being filled with confused and distressing thoughts. He wondered if she had ever made known to any of her friends and associates the past relations that had existed between them, or their present differences. He had not a doubt that it was on his account that the second woman that week had determined to end her life. If it became known he would gain more or less unpleasant notoriety.

"My God," he finally exclaimed aloud, "perhaps this is her revenge! Is it possible the daring, desperate girl would sacrifice herself in this horrible way in order to disgrace me in the eyes of the church and the public. I fear—I greatly fear this has been her method. This is what she must have had in mind when she called to me that I would be brought to the realization that she had done her worst."

With such thoughts running through his head, Fabian Fitzgerald at last turned on his pillow for a few hours sleep. But the gray light of day had only fallen against his window when he was startled from his short slumber by the noisy and excited shouts of newsboys. Hearing the name of the unfortunate girl called, he sprang up quickly and putting his head out of the window, whistled for a paper, too impatient to wait until a later hour for one to be delivered. Thrusting his feet into his slippers and hurriedly slipping into his dressing gown, he went downstairs for the sensational sheet that heralded the news of the suicide.

Her picture was on the first page and there followed a vivid description of the reckless deed. His eye passed hurriedly over the printed page, grasping only the important facts. He was about to lay the paper down with a sigh of relief when he saw additional news. It explained the reason of the girl's rash act. A love affair was hinted at by the friends, though it was not known who the man in the case could be. Later developments might reveal his name. Her friends were slow to give out information.

Much perturbed in mind, he threw the paper aside, quickly bathed and dressed himself and went for his morning walk. He returned shortly and after partaking of a light breakfast was about to assume his duties for the day when he was summoned to the reception room.

Great was his astonishment upon learning that his caller was a reporter for one of the daily papers.

"The authorities have just been gathering fresh evidence of the suicide, or supposed suicide, that took place in this neighborhood last night," explained the caller, "and since your name is now unpleasantly connected with the affair, I have been sent by the paper which I represent for the purpose of giving you fair treatment, sir, through our columns."

"Most considerate of you," said the priest as he motioned his caller to a chair and dropped into one himself. "This is indeed news to me. In what way is my name associated with the unfortunate affair?"

"A letter which was written to you, then torn up and thrown into a waste-basket in the library of the suicide's home, has been patched together. It makes mention of some entanglement existing between you. I have secured a copy of the original. With your consent, sir, I will read it to you."

"Go ahead," said the priest stoically.

"My Dear Fabian," it began. "This is the last appeal that I am going to make to you. Perhaps I had better say threat, for such it is. I am a desperate woman. This you know—made desperate by your coldness and cruelty. I have only lately learned that you are about to sever your connections with the church in order to marry Mercedes Maturin. Let me say to you now, Fabian Fitzgerald, if you dare attempt to marry another after having pledged your faith and love to me, I shall find a way to interfere with your plans. I forbid this marriage. You shall from this hour learn and feel my hatred. I shall oppose you in every way. If you do not come to me upon the receipt of this letter you may have cause to regret it, and if you persist in marrying this girl I shall—" Here the letter broke off. The writer evidently concluding not to send it.

"May I ask what you have to say to this, Father Fitzgerald?' questioned the reporter, as he folded up the letter and returned it to his pocket.

The astounded priest made him no answer for a time, but sat vacantly staring through the window. Finally he said:

"I do not care to make any statement whatever just at this time. I wish to do as well by the unfortunate girl as it is in my power to do. I will only say that she was not justified in taking this position."

The reporter seemed loth to depart with such meager information, but finding the priest firm in his decision and his determination to end the interview, rose reluctantly and passed out.

"Murder is being hinted at instead of suicide,' he remarked, turning around as he reached the outer door.

"What—murder!" exclaimed the priest. "That—that seems scarcely reasonable."

"The authorities are gathering fresh evidence," answered the reporter.

"I cannot think it will result in anything. Still, I have little reason for any opinion in the matter. Good morning, sir," concluded the mystified priest, bowing the man out.

"Well, what next!" gasped the astounded man as he heard the door close upon his caller. "What is back of all this? Of course she killed herself. That is plain. These reporters, though, have got to keep the public on the tip-toe of excitement since that is what they are paid for. Anything to startle the reader, no matter how far form any hint of truth it may be. Well, this is a nice situation! I suppose that letter will be blazoned in the next edition of this highly sensational sheet. It is a wonder the fellow didn't ask for a life-size portrait of myself to go along with it."

He did not know that the kodak man, detailed for this part of the work, had already taken of him a snapshot as he passed down the steps for his morning walk.

Going into the library he threw himself dejectedly into a chair to look over the morning mail. But his mind was too filled with thoughts of his connection with this shocking affair to be enabled to put it on other matters.

He sat with his head resting on his hand, thinking intently of what might be the outcome of this disgrace which he was now called upon to face, when he was again startled by a vigorous ringing of the doorbell.

"Another of those reporters, no doubt," he murmured, and immediately pushed the button.

"Say that I am not at home to any callers today, Maggie," he said to the maid. "See that no one intrudes upon my privacy, unless it be a member of the family or one of the fathers."

After sitting alone for an hour or so in which time the bell rang many times and callers were repeatedly turned away, he rose and started from the room when he came face to face with one of the fathers. Holding out a morning paper, the latter said:

"I came to make some inquiry as to the truth of this article. Do you know that——"

"Step in, step in, I was just starting to find you," said the younger man, endeavoring to assume a natural tone and manner. "We will talk this over."

The whole morning passed in earnest conversation between the two men, then Fabian's ear again caught the newsboy's cry:

"Twelve o'clock American-Times. All about de hor'ble murder of Miss Edith Burke—all about de murder!"

As the voice died on the air, Fabian Fitzgerald sprang up as though a thunderbolt had shot down in front of him.

"My God, listen to that! Send for a paper, father. Surely it cannot be that the girl was murdered."

"A gentleman to see you, Father Fitzgerald," said the maid, coming to the library door. "He won't go away. Here is his card."

"Admit him," ordered the young priest as he glanced at the card and saw that it was the reporter who had called earlier in the morning. I must know what they are saying. Remain, father, and listen to what he has to say."

"I thought by this time you might have some statement to hand me," said the reporter as the door closed on the three.

"Concerning what?"

"Your connection with this crime."

"Oh, you have a paper, may I look at it?" questioned the younger priest."

"Certainly," said the reporter handing it to him.

Fabian was struck almost speechless as he saw his picture along with the fire victim's on the front page of the paper, and scanned the damning headlines.

"By Heaven, they'll accuse me of murdering the girl next, I suppose," he exclaimed.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that such is the case. You are apt to be placed under arrest at any moment."

"What are you saying, man?" gasped the young priest, springing toward the reporter as though he would strike him dead for uttering such words.

"They have collected some strong evidence against you, sir."

"What—what do you mean? What is the evidence?"

"You are the last person known to be with her before the fire was discovered. You had but shortly left the house when the cry of fire was sounded. A heated discussion passed between you and the woman—this was learned from the maid in her employ. A man's handkerchief with your initials embroidered in one corner and of unique design, was found just outside the window on the lower floor. It smelled of and bears marks of kerosene, as though it had been used to wipe oily hands. A coat button from some man's wearing apparel was found in the hall leading to the room where the crime was committed. Of course, nothing is yet known about this link. It may mean nothing—it may mean a great deal. Plainly, the woman did not kill herself, since it is now found that she was bound to the bed with a rope. Then the motive for the crime. She threatened to make you trouble by a public exposure and perhaps in other ways, and forbade your marrying another woman. It is supposed that you feared her revelation and so committed this deed to get her out of the way."

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"A most unfortunate circumstance, my calling when I did," mumbled the priest, as he sank heavily into a chair.

"Have you anything to say in refutation, sir?" questioned the reporter.

"I am too dumfounded to think," answered the stricken man. "What evidence you people can trump up! Kindly excuse me now, sir, and call again. I shall probably hand you a written statement of facts. In the meantime, you are safe in declaring my innocence of the crime. My God, this is hard to believe!" groaned the astounded man.

Scarce had the words fallen from his white lips when two officers stepped into the room.

"I have a warrant for your arrest, Father Fitzgerald," said one.

The other stepped up and examined the buttons of his clothes. "Please produce the coat or coats that you wore when calling on Miss Burke last evening," he said.

"They hang together on a rack in my room, both the under and top coat," answered the priest.

In a short time the officer returned, carrying on his arm the spring overcoat belonging to the young priest.

"I see there is a button gone from it. The one which was picked up in the hallway near the murdered girl's room, and which I have in my possession, exactly matches those now on the coat. I also found this message from her, requesting you to call, in the waste-basket."

Fabian Fitzgerald sat for a moment greatly mystified, staring into the face of the officer without saying a word. Recovering himself he said:

"I swear I was in no room but the parlor—possibly it dropped off on the floor and she picked it up, carrying it with her to the other floor where it was carelessly dropped. May I look at the button and the coat? Humph, no detective who should be in the business could say that button fell from the coat," laughed the priest. "Can't you see that it has been twisted off? By Heaven, I have a thought!"

"Well, we have no time to argue this point now. That can be left to the lawyers. I shall have to ask you to come with us to the station, Father Fitzgerald, our wagon waits outside."

"I shall have no trouble in establishing my innocence. Call a carriage and I will make ready to leave with you at once," answered the priest.

The officers were passing through the hallway with their prisoner when a pitiful cry was heard and Mercedes came hurriedly down the stairway.

"I have just heard—I have just heard—Oh, Fabian!" she moaned.

The accused man requested the privilege of stepping back into the library to speak with the distracted girl.

As the door closed upon them she threw herself into his arms with a despairing cry.

"Don't be foolish, child! You cannot believe any of these outrageous reports, Mercedes?" he asked as she sobbed upon his breast.

"Oh, Fabian, what an insult to my intelligence and my womanhood to ask such a question. Do I believe any of these reports? A thousand times, no! And, Fabian, you did not go to see her last night, did you?"

"Yes, that much is true, my dear. She sent——"

"Fabian—Oh, Fabian, so she used to be your sweetheart, then?"

"Well, I suppose you might term it that in an emergency."

"And—and you loved her, Fabian?"

"I may have thought so at the time. You see I didn't have much knowledge of anything at that tender age. I realize now that I did not love her. Knowing you, little one, has set me right on that point. You are the only woman that I have ever loved."

"Fabian, I believe you," she said, again throwing herself into his arms. "That weight is off my mind. But now about the other. How awful it is, Fabian? What can I do to help you?"

"Pshaw, don't get excited, Mercedes, I'll be back to the house after a little while. I have only to interview the officers and explain my presence in her home last evening when they will release me and I shall return to you."

"You think they won't put you in jail, then? I couldn't bear that, Fabian."

He laughed lightly at her childish questions and fears.

"Heaven knows it is bad enough, but not so bad as all that. No, my angel, I shall be back presently. Keep up your courage."

"Can't I go with you?"

"Well, I think the officers might object. Go find Sister Agnes and stay with her until I return, and—leave the papers alone. They'll hang me in the next edition! Where is Agnes?"

"She went early this morning on some mission of mercy, I do not know just what. I am looking for her every moment. This will break her heart, Fabian."

"Be her comforter, Mercedes. And now I must go. Good-by, dear heart, for a little while."

"Fabian," she said as he put his hand on the door-knob, "this, this trouble has come upon you all through loving me."

"Nonsense! But even so, I am ready to face the vengeance of the furies for its worth."

"Fabian, you are so, so noble. I am not worth all this to you. It—it probably, it would have been best had I really drowned. Then she would not have had this cause for jealousy."

"Mercedes, such speeches you should not utter."

"Then your love will endure? Oh, tell me that it will, Fabian," she pleaded. "Don't look back upon it all and think if—if it were not for her I should never have suffered this disgrace."

"Mercedes, you will compel me to be harsh in a moment. Do not harbor such thoughts. Don't you credit me with a spark of manliness?"

"Forgive me, Fabian; I won't say anything like that again. Neither shall I budge from the upper window or let a spoonful of food pass my lips until you come back to me. I shall pray every moment for your—"

"Time's up," came a gruff voice from the hallway, and Fabian passed out with the officers.

"You defy me!"

When he had gone Mercedes took up her position by the window to watch for her lover's return, her heart uplifted in prayer. When summoned to lunch she refused to go and remained all alone in the room until late in the afternoon when the priest's sister in a fit of excitement burst into the room.

"Oh, Mercedes, do you know?" she gasped.

"Yes, I know, dear little mother, and he told me to comfort you, but I don't know what to say. I have been trying to think of something comforting to tell myself, but in vain. I am watching for his return every moment. He has been gone hours and hours—it seems years. Isn't it shocking to think that a holy man, like Fabian, should be suspected of such a crime?"

"The worst is, I believe that he is condemned by the general public."

"Oh, no, that could not be. He is too noble—too god-like!"

"It isn't true that he was about to sever his ties with the church and marry you, is it, Mercedes?"

At this unexpected question, Mercedes colored painfully, looked down at the floor, out of the window, then turning and facing her questioner, faltered:

"Yes, Mother Agnes."

"And you both have kept this from me?"

"He did not decide to do this until the night before last. We intended to tell you——"

"Mercedes, why did you throw yourself in the lake?" her companion abruptly asked.

"That is the reason—you have guessed it. I decided to drown myself because I loved him too well to live without him."

"And he refused to marry you?"

"He was opposed to it."

"Then by this foolish act of yours you have brought him to this!"

Mercedes let her eyes fall from the reproachful ones of her companion and sat silent.

"Don't you realize that you are to blame for all this disgrace and horror, Mercedes?"

"Don't—don't, I can't bear it," at last gasped the girl. "Don't reproach me, little mother."

"It is so hard not to."

"Do you blame me for loving him?"

"I blame you for telling him so."

"He forced me to do so. You, Mother Agnes, influenced him to make me confess."

"Oh, I see—I see—well, this is a pretty mess! You would not have acknowledged it otherwise?"

"I—I think not."

"Then after all, I am the one at fault."

"No, no, the woman—Edith Burke, she did wrong to force herself upon his notice, knowing, well knowing that he did not love her. How could a woman do this?"

"I know all about that affair, Mercedes. I have known for years. It was I who interfered with this marriage and pleaded with him to enter the priesthood. He took my advice, and how proud I have been of him since. Why couldn't the women leave him alone?"

"He wasn't made to be let alone—such a man. He was made to love, Mother Agnes."

"Oh, patience! patience!" sobbed the grief-stricken sister. "If you really loved him as you should—if you loved him more, or yourself less, Mercedes, you would not have influenced him to take this false step. You would have sacrificed your love to his ambition. You would have felt in him the same interest that I do. You would not have listened to his renouncing his vows of faith to marry you."

"I—I never thought of it in that way. Yes, I suppose I have been very, very selfish. I can see it all now. But you know, I am not your fine character, little mother. I am sorry now that I did not tell you all about it and be advised. Still, it would kill me—just kill me to give him up."

"No, you just think so. Sorrow and disappointment do not kill. Both would have been happier had you never consented to marry him. What a sin for you to do this, Mercedes."

"Is—is there nothing which I might do to mend matters?" questioned the girl, now beginning to sob violently. "I would sacrifice my soul to save Fabian a heartache!"

"It doesn't do any good to talk about that now. But still, you might do this much. When he is released from this ugly charge and returns home you might tell him that you have reconsidered and refuse to have him forsake his profession to marry you. That is the womanly thing, and the unselfish thing to do, Mercedes."

"I would have to talk with Fabian before making you any such promise," said the young girl, now sitting up and drying her eyes. "I am already bound to him by my word of sacred promise. Should he desire to release me——"

"You would go jump in the lake again, I suppose?"

"No, I would go where I might never see him again. For I could not keep from encouraging his love were he near me."

"It would be wise for you to become a nun, Mercedes. That would be your highest calling on this earth."

"Higher than that of a loving wife?" innocently questioned the girl.

"You could do more good in the world to minister to many instead of one, could you not?"

"Perhaps—perhaps. But why did God put this love into a woman's heart if all to no purpose?"

The older woman winced at this question but replied:

"To try us, no doubt. Temptation has its need. The weak fall before temptation."

"Then if being weak means to love, let me be weak, Mother Agnes. Oh, it is glorious to love—to love as I do Fabian. If I must give him up, I can. But never ask me not to love him. I must go on doing this until I am dead. I could no more help it than I could breathe.'

"You are young and so must be foolish. It is hard to argue with youth. But, Mercedes, will you be advised by Father O'Brien?"

"As to what?" questioned the girl with evident alarm.

"To giving up Fabian, of course."

"I do not want to anger you, Sister Agnes, but I must be honest and say I shall be advised by no one but Fabian. Fabian does not think as Father O'Brien, and I have faith in Fabian's superior judgment."

"Then I clearly know my duty. We must reason with him."

"About—about?"

"Yes, about breaking his pledge with you instead of the church. He has disgraced himself sufficiently. It would never do for him to sever his church connections now. Can't you see this? Haven't you the wisdom to understand?"

Mercedes folded one hand over the other and stared speechless for some moments, then said: "Understand, Mother Agnes, that I love Fabian too well not to do that which will most add to his comfort and happiness, no matter how it may wring my heart. So, if Fabian decides that he will be happier in the end to give me up, I shall abide by his decision."

"Spoken like a brave girl, Mercedes. And now prepare yourself, for I assure you he will come to his senses after this horrible experience has passed and listen to me and the fathers. They will be simply horrified to think that he ever dreamed of marrying you. Of course, your being laid out for burial naturally upset him a bit and I think he hardly knew what he was about when he finally consented to marry you. He will remember his path of duty when all this excitement has passed away. So now, Mercedes, what you must do in the meantime is to pray devoutly for forgiveness in tempting him and prepare yourself to become a nun. It is the only thing left for you to do," concluded the foster mother, as she passed from the room.

Agnes Fitsgerald did not mean to be hard. She spoke as she felt and thought, or rather as she had been trained to feel and think.

CHAPTER IV.

Mercedes remained by the wondow watching until night had fallen, her fears increasing with the lengthening hours. At last, hearing a heavy tread on the stairs, she ran joyfully from her room, thinking that Fabian must have entered the house without her knowledge.

Her hope was quickly dispelled as she confronted Father O'Brien.

"Fabian, where is he?" she anxiously questioned.

"I am sorry to tell you, my dear, that he is held."

"Held? for what? What do you mean?"

"Well, the authorities think that the evidence against him is very strong. Strong enought to hold him responsible for the death of Miss Burke."

"Oh, father! Oh, God!" cried the horrified girl. "You can't mean it! I never dreamed—he never dreamed that they would fix this crime upon him. We all know that he is innocent. You know that he is innocent, father?"

"As innocent of this crime as any angel in Heaven, my child."

"Does Mother Agnes know?"

"I have just told her."

"I must go to him—I must go to Fabian at once!" cried the highly excited girl darting through the doorway.

She went directly to find Mother Agnes, and the two lost no time in hurrying to the prison to look after the comfort of the unfortunate priest.

"It is an outrage!" declared the church people who stood nobly by their priest.

"The evidence against him seems incontestable," said the public, "and if he committed this crime, which is one of the most monstrous in history, let him swing for it like the dog that he is!"

Mercedes soon discovered that she was quite the sensation. The beautiful young girl whom the prisoner was to have wed, and who spent so much time with him in his cell, carrying dainties and flowers and books and cheering him as she could, attracted much attention. Some new picture of herself with fresh information of the interesting romance running through the strangely grewsome affair, was seen in nearly every edition of the daily papers.

"They will never convict him," his followers would say, as they with the attorneys for the defense, haunted the dead girl's friends to learn if she had not made some admission or acknowledgement of the premeditated crime. But the dead left no message.

The officers of the law, and the general public became so bitter as fresh evidence was collected against the priest, he realized that the nails were being driven fast and deep into his coffin

One morning as Mercedes was entering the prison, she was attracted by the following conversation that took place between some women, evidently of the lower

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"I had stomach trouble for 20 years, tried doctors' medicines, patent medicines and all simple remedies suggested by my friends, but grew worse all the time.

"Finally a doctor who is the most prominent physician in this part of the State told me medicine would do me no good, only irritate my stomach and make it worse—that I must look to diet and quit drinking coffee.

"I cried out in alarm, "Quit drinking coffee!' why, 'What will I drink?'

" 'Try Postum,' said the doctor, 'I drink it and you will like it when it is made according to directions, and served with cream, for it is delicious and has none of the bad effects coffee has.'

"Well that was over two years ago and I am still drinking Postum. My stomach is right again and I know Doctor hit the nail on the head when he decided coffee was the cause of all my trouble. I only wish I had quit it years ago and drank Postum in its place."

Never too late to mend. Ten days' trial of Postum in place of coffee works wonders. "There's a Reason."

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class, who stood just outside the entrance.

"There she is now," said one.

"Humph, taking him flowers again," scoffed another. "I reckon there never was a villain hung that did not find some silly girl to show him favors."

"She's pretty, sure—almost pretty enough to make any man kill another woman in order to win her."

"She's a fool! She'd better carry her flowers out to the cemetery and lay them on the dead girl's grave."

"Likely she believes him guilty just as most people do, but is trying to be sensational and get her pictures in the paper. She couldn't have any reason and believe that he is innocent."

Mercedes could endure no more. She turned upon the woman who had made this last remark and said:

"Father Fitzgerald is no more guilty of this crime than yourself."

"How is that? He was the last one that saw her alive, wasn't he?"

"That I do not know."

"Well, the authorities do. Then the servant girl, Katie O'Shea, heard them quarreling, didn't she, and swears he said he could kill her?"

"That proves nothing."

"Nor that handkerchief of his picked up outside the window, either, I suppose?"

Mercedes did not answer at once. "No doubt he can satisfactorily explain how it came there," she at last said.

"Yes, and the button off his coat, he can explain that, too, likely? There is no two ways about it. Your lover, the man who you are carrying flowers and gumdrops to, betrayed an honest girl, then killed her so he could marry you. And you love such a man and uphold him in the crime!"

"I believe in him as I do my God!" said Mercedes solemnly, then turned and entered the prison

"He'll hang all right," called one.

Mercedes was much wrought up by the conversation, and observing it, Fabian said:

"Is anything unusual troubling you this morning, Mercedes?"

The miserable girl fell to weeping. Finally as she checked her sobs, she mumbled:

"They are say—saying such dr—dreadful things about you, Fabian. They ask how came your handkerchief outside the open window on the lower floor. Can you tell, Fabian?"

"No, Mercedes, I cannot tell how it came there, but I have my suspicions. I may be wrong and do not care to explain just now what they are."

"And the button off your coat, Fabian, those are such hard things to understand."

"I have my theory about that, too, my dear, but I repeat, I will say nothing of my suspicions unless forced to, as it would sound malicious to many, and if the jury find that the girl died by her own hand it will be better for me to keep still on this point until I have more to back my suspicions."

"You think they will do that, Fabian?"

"What? Oh, prove a suicide. Well, I am hoping so, even though they be wrong. It will make matters less complicated."

"You think so, don't you, Fabian?"

He looked up questioningly, pretending not to understand in order to give more time for thought.

"I think what, Mercedes?"

"Why, that she committed suicide."

"Of that I am not so certain. But it is best for the public to think so if the court so decides. At least, it is best for the present."

She turned and closely studied his face.

"Why, Fabian, you talk strangely. Why is it best for the public to think this if it is not true?"

"It is best so, for future results—until I can get out of here and prove my innocence to the world beyond a doubt."

She let go a litle sigh of relief and fondling his hand said:

"Fabian, should you tell me with your own lips that you committed this crime I would not believe it. I would say that you were bereft of your reason."

"And if I ever do admit such a thing, you may well think so," he laughed. "I greatly appreciate your faith, though, little one."

"Can't you prove your innocence without first getting out of here, Fabian?"

"Not very well. I shall go to work on my own theory to unearth or unravel the whole mystery if I am liberated."

"If you are liberated? Of course you will be," cried the girl in a frightened voice, "you, who are as innocent as a babe, must be proven so."

"I wouldn't be the first innocent man to hang, Mercedes. Since I have been placed in this position and listened to all the damning and trumped up evidence collected against me, as also the wild clamor of the public for my blood, I only wonder that more innocent persons are not strung up. I am rather surprised that any escape. It is simply astounding the evidence that can be found to incriminate a man when once suspicion falls upon his head. From my own point of view, everything seems strongly in favor of my conviction. You must see this, Mercedes."

"Oh, Fabian! You are breaking my heart! It—it cannot be! You must be enabled to satisfactorily explain everything and establish your innocence beyond a doubt when the trial comes on."

"I only wish, dear one, that I felt as sanguine as you do about the matter. But it seems everything is against me. It is the most unfortunate case of circumstantial evidence that an innocent man was ever called upon to face. So also think the fathers and my good sister Agnes. I tell you all this, Mercedes, that you may not be too greatly shocked should the trial go against me. You must not be too hopeful. There, don't cry so, little girl—don't sob like that. I did not mean to grieve or alarm you, only to prepare you. There, dry your tears, you see I am only presenting the worst side. Many things may happen before the time set for trial."

"Maybe a letter will be found—that is, some acknowledgement or st—statement from her admitting that she intentionally destroyed herself," said Mercedes between her sobs.

"Perhaps so," answered the priest with a mental reservation. "And now, my dear, cheer up and do not take so seriously what I said. As I told you, I presented the worst side of the case. We shall think only of the brighter side."

"Yes, that is the way to do," she answered more cheerfully. "The button dropped off your coat in the parlor. You can prove this."

"Possibly, in time."

"Then you haven't carried a handkerchief like that ever in your life, so Mother Agnes said."

"She is my sister. Her testimony won't count for much."

"You did not say that you could kill her, either, or——"

"Yes, I said that, Mercedes, in a temper, with no meaning. Just as any one in a passion makes idle threats."

"The maid thought you meant it, though, and feared to leave her mistress alone in the house with you, so 'tis said."

"Yes, that sounds bad for me, I must admit. But all men say such things. Don't bother, the jury will understand that," he said consolingly, yet with secret doubt.

"But she was tied to the bed—her hands were still tied with the rope when they found her. That looks as though some one else than herself must have—" She broke off and looked up into his face questioningly.

"That is the hardest knot of all to undo, Mercedes, but it has been explained in my mind ever since my incarceration."

"You will have the chance to make this all clear when the trial comes up, Fabian?"

"Yes, I can make known my theory of the whole thing, but more likely it will only be laughed at since the public is so bitter, and having little to substantiate my theory, I shall be more severely criticised than ever for trying to fasten the crime, or a lasting stain, upon the dead girl's name. I am in a bad position, Mercedes, still I expect in the end to get out of it."

"Dear me, but you are in an awful way, sure enough, Fabian."

"Yes, it seems so at the present moment, but I must tell you that the fathers have employed a special detective upon the case. I made known to them my suspicions and they at once fell in with my views. My only hope, Mercedes, is that this detective may get the evidence that he has been sent after. Still, I have little faith in the ability of many of these fellows. If I were only free to go after the thing myself, I feel positive I could soon prove my innocence."

"Perhaps I could help you, Fabian. Why do you not trust me with the secret?"

"We will await developments, my dear, and see how the trial goes. If it is against me, then it will be necessary for me to confide in you. I shall need your assistance then, my true-hearted little girl."

"Then it may be too late."

"I think not. Leave this to my judgment, dear one. My brain is not so sluggish during the hours that I pass in the cell here. You must in the meantime be brave and hopeful."

"I shall try to, for surely God would not let the life of an innocent good man, like yourself, be sacrificed, Fabian. I shall put my trust in Him. It seems when holy men like the fathers have faith in you, the public is unwise to denounce you so utterly. They should know that the fathers, the church, would uphold no wrong."

"Well, Mercedes, you know the protestants think we people, we priests and Catholics, are ready to hide and cover up any crime, since we look to a higher court to judge and punish our sins than that which we find in this world. No, the fathers' faith in me has little weight with the general public which thinks that, believing me either guilty or innocent, the priests would take the same stand."

"This reminds me, dear Fabian, there is something which I have wished to talk with you about, but have hesitated to do so, knowing how troubled you are already. It—it seems since the church has stood by you so nobly it were a sin to—to—turn deserter. Your sister Agnes thinks I have done very wrong to encourage your love, knowing well how it must all end, and I have at times felt very sinful on that account. She insists that it is my duty to you and to the church, to give you up—to—to—not ask you to keep your promise to marry me."

"And what did you tell her, little girl?"

"I said that I would leave this for you to decide. That your judgment I would trust rather than my own or that of any other. So, Fabian, if—if—you think it best to keep your vows of faith, why, I shall—I shall try not to hinder you. I—I love you too greatly to stand in your way or do that which may call down unjust criticism upon your head. I would not bring greater sorrow and distress to you who now have so much to bear," she concluded with half a sob.

He listened until she had finished without any attempt to interrupt her. Then looking straight into her troubled, tearful eyes with his great solemn ones, he asked:

"Mercedes, are you quite positive that my sister Agnes put this thought into your mind? That you did not yourself conceive it?"

"Oh, indeed she did. I am not noble or good or fine enough to have taken this view of it. I fear I have been very selfish. But tell me, Fabian, have the fathers mentioned this matter to you?"

"Yes, oh yes—we have talked it over."

"And she, too, Mother Agnes has spoken to you about this?"

"Yes, we talked at length upon the subject last evening. She knows that I shall stand by my convictions."

"They—they all think you should—that is—you should remain with the church, Fabian?"

"Of course."

"And you?"

"I cannot agree with them."

"You will still want to marry me?"

"My highest conception of bliss is that I may speedily free myself of these charges and make you my wife, just as we have planned, Mercedes."

"Oh, Fabian, Fabian, I am happy once again! I—I have fought and prayed against wishing that you might decide in this way, but—but you see, I cannot help my nature. While I prayed for strength to make the sacrifice, something way deep down in my heart kept crying out against giving you up. I suppose it is very selfish of me, but Oh, I love you so greatly! I cannot keep back or deny my nature's pleadings."

"And you should not, dear. Have I not repeatedly said that henceforth we would hearken to the voice of Nature instead of man?"

"Yes, I had that in mind, Fabian, when I said that I would leave the matter to your judgment. Of course, the church will condemn me."

"Yes, both of us, in a way. That is the price we have to pay for loving, Mercedes. But it is worth the price, is it not?"

"Yes, Fabian, and a thousand crucifixions!"

"Spoken like the girl that you are! We are on the right side of the question, Mercedes. With all due respect to my early teachings, I know that down at the bottom of the natural law is the moral law, whatever they may argue against it. If we are right, that law will reward us. If we are wrong, it will punish us, for there is no getting away from this. Were there not a Bible or Catechism in existence, they would not be missed in this sense, for Nature's great laws of compensation keep right on about their business. The critics are constantly tearing the creeds to tatters, and generally knocking the bottom out of our father's teachings, but they cannot touch Nature's laws. So, my dear, if nature directs your heart to me, do not try to ignore or suppress its yearnings. God knows, I need your love!"

"Oh, Fabian, how you have comforted me!"

"I understand, Mercedes, that the public is much interested to know how this affair is to end between us, that is, in case I am acquitted. But this secret of ours we will keep. The fathers will give out no information. I don't mind having the whole world know of my love for you, my queen; in fact, I should like to publish it broadcast, but since the good fathers have requested me to remain silent on the subject for the present, I think it is best to do so. Father O'Brien believes it is better for my case not to state positively my intentions for the future. They feel that the church is more or less a protection and support to me in this unfortunate affair. It is generous and Christian of them to take this position under the existing circumstances, Mercedes."

"Indeed I agree with you, Fabian. How I wish we might wed and still keep our vows. But it cannot be so. I shall always love and have a very high regard for the fathers for this, Fabian."

"And so you should, Mercedes. Father O'Brien said were it any other woman under the heavens than yourself, Mercedes, he would have little patience with me."

"How he overrates me. I am very weak and sinful. Mother Agnes knows this."

He smiled sadly. "Would to Heaven that all women were as sinless, but you have not told me as yet about my sister. Is she feeling no better? I had hoped to see her with you this morning."

Mercedes dropped her eyes and answered confusedly:

"She—she is some easier, we think. But the doctor did not advise her coming out. The pain in her chest is quite bad as yet."

"Worry, it all comes of worry over my trouble. You know, Mercedes, that I have been her pride and hope. And now to see me like this!"

"She may be better tomorrow and can come to see you perhaps," said Mercedes rising, "but that reminds me, I must go back now and help to look after her. I try to do so, that is, to help her, but she has got it into her head that I must not come near. I greatly fear that she is offended with me."

That the worshipping sister had collapsed fully, and that brain fever together with pneumonia was fast consuming her vitality, Mercedes did not have the heart to tell the prisoner. The next time would do, or perhaps it were best to leave the task to Father O'Brien. Promising to send him upon her return, Mercedes now rose and took her departure.

"Was man ever so beset with trouble?" groaned the priest, when toward evening the news was carried to him that his sister was not expected to live but a few hours and her dying wish was that she might see her brother. While his lawyer and friends set themselves about getting permission for him to go to her bedside, Fabian sat anxiously and impatiently awaiting developments, his heart wrung with anguish.

It was near midnight that he found himself handcuffed and on his way back to the parish house.

His mind filled with pained and conflicting thoughts, he at last hurried up the steps and entered the house. Great was his surprise and joy when once inside he was met by the family physician who was just leaving, and informed him the fever was turning in the patient's favor. There was now hope that she might be saved. Nothing, however, must be said to excite or worry her. As he entered the sick room Fabian found Mercedes standing at the foot of the bed. She greeted him with a sad, weak little smile and turned to leave the room, but was requested by the sufferer to remain.

With a grateful, loving look bestowed upon her brother, the one who had been so near death reached for his hand.

"I am so glad that you came, my boy," she whispered.

He stooped and fondly kissed her.

"I have a request to make of you before, before I go," she continued.

Fabian started from his position. He readily guessed her meaning.

"You are improving fast, dear sister, you will soon be well. Get such foolish ideas out of your head. Of course, you have been very ill, but now you are all right."

"No you mistake—I am not, Fabian. I—I am so faint. I fear this faintness means death."

"No, no, don't distress yourself so. You are all wrong."

"This may be my last chance ever to speak with you, Fabian, the last time that you will see me alive."

"The doctor said that you must not talk, dear. You are exciting yourself unnecessarily."

"But I know best, Fabian. My time is short and—and I want to ask you before I go, to stay with the church."

He feared this was coming and not for the world would he have had it so. What to say in answer puzzled him sorely. He endeavored to equivocate.

"I may not—that is, I may not have any choice," he faltered.

"True—that is true. But if you are acquitted promise me, Fabian, that you will remain true to the teachings of the fathers."

"I have pledged my faith elsewhere, you know."

"To her, you mean?"

"Yes."

"That is easily overcome. Mercedes is willing and ready to give you up. We have talked at length. You have only to say the word, to make me this promise. It is my last request."

The man, as he listened, showed signs of deep agitation. He really was almost distracted. Two forces claimed him. He was being pulled as with a vice in two directions. To deny her request would probably mean taking the life of one who had mothered and fathered, nursed and cared for him always. What should he do? What should he say? To tell her a falsehood was the only way out of it, but like all others he hesitated to do this. It seemed that a promise to the dead or dying should be held sacred. Could he make her such a promise? At last he said:

"Give me a moment to think about this, Agnes," and turned to the window.

As he did so he attempted to catch the eye of Mercedes, but she refused to meet his gaze, though he could see that she suffered intensely.

"My God, how many times more am I

(Continued on page fifteen.)

Women Avoid Operations

When a woman suffering from female trouble is told that an operation is necessary, it, of course, frightens her.

The very thought of the hospital, the operating table and the knife strikes terror to her heart.

It is quite true that these troubles may reach a stage where an operation is the only resource, but a great many women have been cured by Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound after an operation has been decided upon as the only cure. The strongest and most grateful statements possible to make come from women who by taking

MISS ROSE MOORE

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

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A lawsuit is the thief of time and money.

Happiness is often nothing but conceit.

And it is better to be a has-been than a never-was.

Thrift and stinginess are as similar as they are different.

If a man is incompetent he usually charges it up to bad luck.

Men with long heads are capable of using them on short notice.

Some men talk too loud and all women talk too much.

Freedom exists only in our minds. No man is really free.

Many a grafter has built his fortune on a steal foundation.

Some men attempt to do a main-tent stunt on a side-show ability.

A man thinks he's just as good as anybody when he goes to church in the rain.

Our idea of a hypocrite is a man who really admires his mother-in-law, but is too contrary to admit the fact.

A New York court has decided that oysters are wild animals. Could an oyster kill an antelope by biting it in the neck?

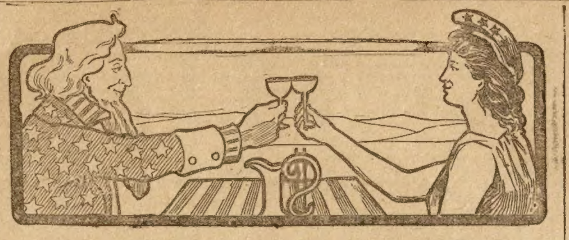
Jim Hill has relented. After all the cruel things he has said in the past he is now willing to allow the Government to O. K. his bonds.

Senator Depew has gone to Europe, but he will not be missed, as the people have become accustomed to running this country without him.

A Topeka, Kan., man has been sent to jail for five years for taking a drink of whisky. He ought to be free from the habit by the time he gets out.

Oklahoma is talking of sending a blind man to the Senate. We have had men there before who were blind to certain things, though otherwise their eyesight was fine.

A German inventor has discovered how to make the covering of the lead in the lead pencil out of potato instead of wood, and he promises to drive the wooden article out of the market. By careful figuring he estimates that he can make each pencil for $.00928. It would be a great pleasure and surprise to mankind that has been paying five cents for its pencils to be able to step up to the counter, hand the clerk $.00928 and walk away with a nice pencil, or even to put down a cent and wait for the change. The human race certainly would be happier with cheaper pencils, and then, too, it would feel more secure with markers made of potato, for the man who got lost in the woods and was threatened with starvation could eat his pencil and feel much revived.



THE DEATH-KEY MYSTERY;

—OR—

A Great Detective's Ruse.

By J. BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS.

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CHAPTER VII.

After dinner, Keeneyes and Jansen Moore spent the rest of the day in their hotel room.

Jansen Moore had his mustache cut off. It was, in fact, a severe blow to his self-complacency. He was sure he looked better with it, but he would show Sopha Le Brune that he was not vain.

Night came.

"Now," said Keeneyes, "let us go out to Whiteoak Farm."

"I would rather wait till morning when Sopha will be at home," Jansen Moore objected.

"But my dear fellow," said the detective, "we are to pass the night in that large barn."

"Why?"

"Why? Did you not make an appointment with J. J. James to come there to interview you between ten and eleven?"

"No, I didn't," said Moore forcibly.

"Well, I made the appointment for you," the other smiled.

"Yes, but afterwards you wrote telling him not to come."

"And do you suppose that will make any difference in his plans?"

"Naturally."

"Well, it will not," returned the detective.

"Then he will come there between ten and eleven to see me?"

"Of course not, Moore; it never entered his head to come there between ten and eleven."

Moore sat down. "I don't understand this," he said. "You say we must go to the barn because we told J. J. James to come there between ten and eleven, yet you say he will not come between ten and eleven."

"Precisely," said Keeneyes; "it is as simple as two and two make four. And besides, Moore, suppose he did come, what would you say to him? Why do you want him to come?"

"I never wanted him to come, and you know it."

"Then let's be going," said Keeneyes decidedly; "it is growing late."

Jansen Moore never came to the point of open rebellion to Keeneyes; his gratitude for almost unheard-of favors was too sincere. But the most obedient slave may grumble in the hearing of a tolerant master. The young man followed without taking any pains to conceal his unwillingness. The thought of secreting themselves in the barn was repugnant to his nature. To the detective it was as natural a course of action as carrying a dark-lantern or sleeping in one's clothes, but to the young man who fancied himself already in love with the young lady of Whiteoak, the adventure as mapped out appeared mean and unworthy. What would Sopha think if she knew he was sneaking across the back-lot to the barn?

"You want to look out for that vicious horse," Moore whispered, as they climbed the lot gate.

"The horse that killed old Boliver Bering?" suggested Keeneyes softly.

"I didn't say it killed him," returned Moore; "I suggested it as a reasonable inference."

"You'd better leave reasonable inferences to me," returned Keeneyes, displeased at hearing one of his pet phrases on another man's lips. "Don't make a noise, Moore, and don't get to contending. You come close behind me."

The night was extremely dark, but the big barn loomed up somberly at a short distance. They crossed the grassless lot, feeling their way cautiously over the corncobs.

Moore whispered, "I wonder where that vicious horse is?"

"I hear something following us," said Keeneyes in an undertone; "possibly the beast is looking for a place to nab us."

"Yes, I hear it," said Moore uneasily. "Let's break for the barn. I don't like this."

A threatening snort from the rear mingled with the pawing of agitated hoofs. "Yes," said Keeneyes shortly, "run!"

They dashed toward the barn.

The horse came after them on a wild charge, whinnying and casting up its hind legs. As they reached the barn door the horse overtook them. It wheeled about to direct operations upon them with its forces from the rear.

Fortunately the barn door stood open.

The men rushed within and closed it.

Instantly there ensued a thundering succession of terrific blows upon the quaking boards.

"Is there a loft?" panted Moore; "let me climb to it."

"Here's a ladder," said Keeneyes chuckling, but breathless. "Would anything along that line suit you?"

"Give it to me," cried Moore.

The ladder was nailed to the wall. Moore ascended. "Come on," he cautiously called; "it leads up to the loft, sure enough."

Keeneyes followed. "Ah," he said with satisfaction, "this is delightful; plenty of hay; we ought to have a splendid night's rest up here."

The rain of the horse's hoofs against the barn door continued its flood of sound.

"Yes," said Moore ironically, "we have a sweet lullaby. Mr. Zellers, I wish you would tell me why we ever came to this barn. What can we hope to do shut up here in the loft?"

"Do you think I have come here without a reason?" asked Keeneyes with dignity.

"I'd like to know what the reason is," Moore evaded him.

"Now, Moore, remember our compact; I am to keep you advised of all the facts in the case; you are to do your own reasoning on the why and wherefore. So please don't ask me the reason for anything. We are here; that's a fact I am handing you. As to why we are here, you must deduce that from the fact as given. I assure you we are not here for fun."

"No, I'm sure I'm not," growled Moore.

"Very good," returned Keeneyes. "Then let us cast ourselves upon this hay and seek what slumber is coming."

Moore lay down, but he did not sleep for some time.

His wakefulness, however, made his slumber the more profound when it finally overtook him.

He was roused from unconsciousness, by feeling strong hands grappling with his arms.

"Hallo!" muttered Jansen Moore sleepily, "what kind of a fact is this you're handing me?"

"Shut up!" said a strange voice in good American. "If you make any racket we'll knock you in the head."

Moore was thrilled with alarm. He sought to spring up, but two pairs of arms overpowered him.

A lantern stood upon the loft floor, but Moore was blindfolded and could see nothing.

"Where's that there rope?" asked the first speaker.

"Here it is," the second captor answered.

"Then why don't you use it?" the first retorted gruffly. "What are you having it for? You don't have to save that to get hung with; ropes is free at them entertainments."

The other bound Jansen Moore's arms and legs with the rope.

"What does this mean?" demanded Moore as loudly as he dared.

"It don't mean nothing," said the first speaker. "We jest didn't have nothing else to do, so we've taken a notion to truss you up. We thought it might intrist you and we knowed it would us."

The lantern was extinguished.

When the men's hands released him, Moore tried to wriggle from the spot and was dismayed on finding that he had been securely fastened to one of the uprights of the loft. He was powerless, except to call for help. This he might do when the ruffians were safely away. In the meantime, suddenly a thought occurred to him.

"What do you fellows want?" he demanded.

"I want to go," said the first.

"Me, same," said the second. Moore heard them feeling their way toward the head of the ladder.

Moore cried out, "I know you, Mr. James!" He made this exclamation upon the supposition that one of his captors was J. J. James."

"I am glad you do," said the first speaker; "my name is Mr. James."

"So is mine," said the other, who seemed in the best of humor. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Tied-up-in-the-Hay; pleased to meet you, sir."

The men went down the ladder. Moore heard them leave the barn. There was no sound from the vicious horse.

Moore whispered, "Mr. Zellers!"

No answer.

It was intensely dark in the loft.

Moore was deeply perplexed. Where was Keeneyes? Had the men first overcome that astute detective? If not, Keeneyes must have slipped away before their arrival. Why had he slipped away? Could he have known the men were coming? Was it at Zellers' connivance or desire that Moore lay helplessly chafing in his bonds? On the other hand, had anything serious happened to his companion? Keeneyes was a very light sleeper; he would not suffer himself to be bound without some sort of resistance. Perhaps he even now lay upon the hay, stunned by a cruel blow. It was even possible that he had been assassinated.

It would have been some relief to Jansen Moore could he have felt anger at Keeneyes over this predicament. It was all Keeneyes' fault that they had come to the barn. Still, Moore could not be angry at a man who perhaps lay dead almost within reach of his hand. With what fortitude he might command, he waited for the dawn.

At last the morning came. No lover ever hailed the arrival of his heart's delight with more rapture than Jansen Moore hailed and greeted the pale, dusty light that stole through the crevices of the loft and made the interior dimly apparent. As the morning wore on, it became evident that Keeneyes was not in the loft; or, if he were, his body had been effectually concealed by the hay.

Moore was stiff and sore, but he had not summoned the resolution to shout for help. In the first place, not a sound came to his ears save that of some fowls in the lot below and of mice scurrying along the walls, and of pigeons upon the roof. He remembered how far the barn was from the house, and he did not think it possible his cries could be heard by Mrs. Le Brune.

Moreover, it was inevitable that whenever he should be found, the question would confront him: "But why were you in the barn at such an hour of the night?" What would people think when he confessed that he did not know why he was in the barn?

"It is a most deplorable situation," Moore reflected. "Still I cannot let the day slip by without calling for assistance; but I will wait as long as possible. Perhaps Keeneyes was not set upon. Perhaps he fled from my captors; in that case, he will deliver me without exciting the farmhands to a search."

At last Moore heard footsteps in the barn lot. They were coming nearer. "Now is the time to call for help," thought Moore, but he did not lift his voice.

Several people approached the barn. They were conversing quietly, as if Whiteoak Farm was a place where nothing sinister ever happened. A man's voice mingled with that of two ladies. The three speakers entered the barn and stood directly under the part of the loft where Moore lay a helpless prisoner.

CHAPTER VIII.

Moore did not strain at his bonds, because he had already chafed his limbs to no avail by struggling in the ropes. And, although the little party of three were directly beneath him as he lay in the loft, he still restrained himself from calling for help.

It was not because he feared the three were enemies or had had anything to do with his imprisoning. The fact that two of the newcomers were ladies banished that supposition.

Moreover, as the young man listened attentively, he became aware of the fact that the man of the party in the barn was Keeneyes.

Yes, there could be no doubt of it; Keeneyes was talking to the ladies in the most natural and pleasant of voices, and the ladies were Mrs. Le Brune and her daughter.

Evidently Sopha Le Brune had arrived that morning as expected.

Did they know Jansen Moore was lying bound hand and foot immediately above their heads? The young man's blood boiled with anger against Keeneyes, and with eagerness to see the young lady who had enchanted his fancy. But Jansen Moore would not subject himself to the humiliation of a discovery by making an outcry. Accordingly he composed himself to wait for the departure of the ladies, when no doubt Keeneyes would ascend to his deliverance.

In the meantime, as the reader is not bound hand and foot in the loft, we invite him down to the lower part of the barn, where he may stand upon solid ground. Here he will find Keeneyes, conversing easily with Mrs. Le Brune and Miss Sopha Le Brune, and he may forget, if he will, that Jansen Moore is gnashing his teeth overhead.

The party of three stood in a sort of hallway that extended from front to rear of the barn. A big door at either end stood open. On one side were the stalls, on the other, feed-bins.

Keeneyes walked to the ladder that led to the loft and said, "This reminds me of when I was a boy. I dearly loved to climb barn ladders and breathe the fragrance of the hay. You wouldn't object if I ran up just for the exercise, would you?"

"Of course not, Mr. Moore," said Mrs. Le Brune.

It will be remembered that as Mrs. Le Brune had mistaken Jansen Moore for Keeneyes, Keeneyes had agreed to assume the character of Jansen Moore. Sopha, who knew the truth, but who had been wired to keep up the deception, bit her lip to keep from smiling. She liked Keeneyes, and after so severely ridiculing Jansen Moore in her letter to her mother, she could not appear before her mother to tolerate Keeneyes, since in her mother's eyes Keeneyes was Jansen Moore.

"Well, I'll not go up the ladder just now," said Keeneyes, giving it a kick for the benefit of Jansen Moore's listening ears. "As you may very well suppose, I have not requested you to come to the barn to give an exhibition of my skill at ladder-climbing. I may not go up into the loft until tomorrow; there's plenty of time for that."

"Then pray proceed to business," said Mrs. Le Brune coldly, as she recalled Sopha's denunciations of Moore. She suspected that Keeneyes, whom she supposed to be Moore, had brought them here as a pretext simply because he wanted to be in her daughter's society as much as possible.

"In the absence of Keeneyes," said that detective quietly, "I am left to conduct this case; not for long, of course, but during this day at least."

"It is very unfortunate," said Mrs. Le Brune, "that Mr. Keeneyes, whom we expressly engaged, should go away and leave our affairs in your hands, Mr. Moore. It was Keeneyes that we wanted"

"Mother," said Sopha, "I am sure it is

for the best. Mr. Keeneyes would not desert us without sufficient reason."

"Very neatly put," cried Keeneyes: "and I assure you Keeneyes would not have gone away had he not known that I can do as well as he what must be done today. Keeneyes was never known to desert his post. And he was never known to fail to penetrate to the very core of a mystery, the very core, madam, and count the seeds, madam. So rest at ease. Where he is now is no matter. He will be here tomorrow. I promise you on the honor of Jansen Moore, madam. But now to business."

"Yes!" said Mrs. Le Brune icily.

"Madam, Keeneyes has in his possession some pictures taken of the farmhouse and its interior at the time of the unhappy death of your uncle Boliver Bering. One of the pictures shows the interior of the kitchen; the room where Phil Deedum says he saw the corpse, and the room in which nobody else but Phil Deedum saw the corpse."

"Well?"

"Well, madam, Keeneyes pointed out to me that in the picture something most amazing is to be seen lying upon the floor."

"I remember that picture very well," said Mrs. Le Brune, "but there is nothing amazing upon the floor except Mr. Phil Deedum's walking-stick."

"Oh, pardon me, madam," said the detective smiling, "Keeneyes showed me, lying not far from the spot where Phil Deedum says he discovered the corpse, a large iron key."

"Oh, yes, mother," said Sopha, "don't you remember that key?"

"No. If I noticed it I have forgotten. But there is nothing amazing about an iron key, is there, Mr. Moore?"

"There might be," said Keeneyes. "In the opinion of Keeneyes, that is the key to your uncle's mystery."

"Mr. Moore, you speak enigmas."

"Why, thank you, madam," said Keeneyes, very much pleased, "thank you. It is not my wish to discuss that key and its bearings upon the case. But it is necessary to find that key."

"I do not know what key it was," said Mrs. Le Brune stiffly, "and I could have told you that without coming down here to the barn."

"No, pardon me," returned Keeneyes; "I hope by coming here to find a clew to that key. Now Miss Sopha, you know nothing of the key?"

"I don't know what key it was, Mr. Zellers."

"You mean Mr. Moore," Keeneyes corrected her.

"Oh," said Sopha, concealing a smile, "pardon me, Mr. Moore."

Keeneyes twirled his mustache boastfully. He asked, "Was no inquiry made for that key at the time of the tragedy?"

"I never heard it mentioned."

"Nobody tried to find how it happened to be lying there upon the floor?"

"If any one thought of it, I suppose," remarked Mrs. Le Brune, "that they judged it had been dropped, Mr. Moore."

"Ah, yes," said Keeneyes, smiling again; "dropped, you say. Very good. Excellent. Now, is no key missing about your house, madam?"

"None."

"Then that brings us to the barn," cried Keeneyes triumphantly. In fact, madam, I thought that key too big and heavy to be a house key. Now I insist upon your looking about you. Is there no key missing to any of these locks or padlocks?—a key that has been gone so long—let us say four years—that nobody ever thinks about it any more?"

Mrs. Le Brune shook her head.

"I wish the farmhands were here," said Keeneyes. "But you tell me they have taken the horse-trainer to town to have his ribs reset and his legs straightened out. Now, for instance, this huge lock on the corn-bin, it seems half-choked up with dust."

"We never lock that."

"Is there a key?"

"There hasn't been since we moved here."

"How long ago?"

"About three years ago."

"Then that key in the picture might be the key belonging to this lock?"

"There is nothing to prove that, Mr. Moore."

"Still it is a possibility, isn't it, madam?"

"Almost anything is a possibility," said Mrs. Le Brune perversely.

"Why, thank you for the admission. Then it is possible that the key in the picture belonged to this lock?"

"I do not remember having seen the key in the picture——"

"It was a large, heavy, iron key."

"Then I suppose it might have belonged to this lock."

"Good!" cried Keeneyes. "Thank you. I am delighted that you grant so much. It is a reasonable inference, then, that that key belonged down here at the barn. Now, why should it have been up at the house, and why lying there in the kitchen on the floor? And in particular, why upon the very day of the murder? You don't suppose that that barn key was kept customarily upon the kitchen floor, do you?"

"I think nothing about it," said Mrs. Le Brune, displeased at the other's domineering manner; "we do not know that it was the barn key; and I intend to have nothing more to do with this matter until Mr. Keeneyes comes back, for he is the detective we have employed."

"And you could not have employed a better one," said Keeneyes.

"Come, Sopha," said her mother, "let us go to the house."

"I trust you will not object to my hunting for that key, madam?"

"If you will confine your search to the barn and lot, I do not object to anything you may do," said the lady.

"Then please do not let the men turn out that vicious horse when they come back from town. Let it be kept fastened in the back pasture. And you need not call me to dinner, Mrs. Le Brune,' added Keeneyes, waving his hands and twirling his mustache as boldly as he dared; he was afraid to tweak it too hard, because it was a false mustache, assumed for Jansen Moore's benefit.

When the ladies were gone, Keeneyes climbed the ladder, softly singing to himself, as if unaware that Jansen Moore lay bound hand and foot, awaiting his coming.

CHAPTER IX.

It is not to be supposed that Jansen Moore waited for Keeneyes with a spirit of forbearance.

Even if the young man had not been chafed by the ropes that tied him relentlessly to the upright in the barn loft, the belief that the detective knew of his confinement would have made him sore enough.

He had heard the conversation of Keeneyes with Mrs. Le Brune and Sopha. He had been tantalized with images of that young lady without being able to verify the impressions of memory by actual sight. All his inconvenience and limitations he placed at Keeneyes' account, and when that imperturbable gentleman appeared at the top of the ladder, Jansen Moore tightly closed his mouth and eyes and lay mute.

"Bless my soul!" Keeneyes softly exclaimed, "what is this before me? A recumbent form? Jansen Moore? Surely it is Jansen Moore, is it not?"

"You ought to know," said Moore gruffly. "Will you release me?"

"Why ought I to know?" demanded Keeneyes, as he whipped out his knife. The ropes were presently severed and Moore stretched and rubbed himself, groaning.

"You knew all about this," said Moore petulantly. "If you didn't have this outrage perpetrated, you connived at it."

"Nonsense!" returned the detective. "You are in an ill humor, but that under the circumstances is quite natural. I knew nothing of your being tied up in any such fashion. How did you do it?"

"You don't know?" demanded Moore suspiciously, as he sank upon the hay to rest.

"Oh, I suppose I know," returned Keeneyes. "What I said was that I didn't know. As soon as I saw you lying there I inferred the truth, of course."

"Then what is the truth?" demanded the young man, still rubbing his stiffened limbs.

"I will elucidate," said Keeneyes cheerfully. "Shall I begin at the beginning?"

"I don't care where you begin," said Moore irritably, "just so you come out at the place where I was so vilely set upon and outraged. If there is law in the land I'll be righted over this."

"My dear fellow," said Keeneyes gently, "there is law in the land, but there is also a Legislature, so likely enough the law won't do you any good. Pray be calm; in a few words all is told, and I assure you I have nothing to do with the outrage committed against you, as you call it."

"Well!" expostulated his friend, "haven't I a right to call it an outrage? What do you call it?"

"Why, I simply call it a fact. It interests me as a fact. It assumes no moral significance in my eyes."

"I dare say you'd see a moral significance in it if it had been you tied up here all night and half of the day."

"I dare say I would," said Keeneyes; "but you see, it was another fellow. Now, let us discuss affairs cheerfully. When I left you last night you were sleeping as soundly and sweetly as a babe."

"Why did you go away?"

"Yes, you have a right to ask that, since I am to give you every fact in this mystery case. Well, then, I slipped away to search for the iron key."

"What iron key?" Moore asked peevishly.

"The iron key," Keeneyes patiently explained, "which the picture in the old newspaper represents as lying upon the kitchen floor near the spot——"

"Yes, yes," Moore interposed peevishly.

"Near the spot," Keeneyes firmly persisted, "where Phil Deedum swore he discovered the corpse of old Boliver Bering.

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Moore. "I remember what a point you've always made of that key."

"To you," said Keeneyes, "has that key no importance?"

"None whatever," said Moore promptly. "Why did you want to find it, Mr. Zellers? What can you do with it?"

"But, my friend, I do not want to find it."

"You just said you slipped away from me last night to hunt for it."

"Yes, and I repeat that I had no desire to find it."

"Then why did you hunt for it?"

"That I must leave you to infer. Remember, I hand you the facts and you are to do the reasoning to conclusions."

"Mr. Zellers, is it really a fact that you were hunting for something that you did not want to find?"

"Upon my honor, Moore, that is the absolute fact."

"Then I infer," said Moore, "that you either had more time on your hands than you knew what to do with, or else you simply wanted a pretext to get away to leave me at the mercy of thugs."

"Neither supposition is any credit to me, or you either," said Keeneyes, "and both are erroneous."

"Well, I care nothing about the key," said Moore. "What I want to know is, who tied me in those ropes last night?"

"As I was saying," remarked Keeneyes, "I went to search for that mysterious iron key. I employed most of the night in fruitless yet successful labor. What I mean is, I found no trace of it, which pleased me exceedingly. This morning the horse-trainer came early and the vicious horse was put in the back pasture and the horse-trainer was carried to town to have his ribs mended. Then Miss Sopha Le Brune came in on the morning train. It was necessary to find if either of the ladies, Miss Sopha or her mother, knew about the key.

"So you led them down here; yes, I heard you talking," said Moore. "You knew all the time that I was right overhead, didn't you?"

"I suspected it. I had left you in the loft; I hadn't seen you come out."

"You were here at Whiteoak Farm all night yet didn't see those ruffians come here to the barn to overpower me?—and they carried a lantern, too," cried Moore.

"Just so," said Keeneyes. "But remember I was most delicately occupied. I was looking for the iron key in the house. Mrs. Le Brune is a light sleeper and I had to be very cautious——"

"Surely, Mr. Zellers, you didn't break into the house!" exclaimed the other.

"I entered it," said Keeneyes. "Gentlemen in my profession do not speak of breaking into houses. A detective is like a summer breeze; he comes and goes as he listeth. But the key is not in the house. I am quite sure of it. I was delighted not to find it."

"But why didn't you come back to the barn this morning to see what had become of me?"

"The horse-trainer and the farmhands were very active after daybreak and I was obliged to keep away from the barn lest I bring them down upon you. And after the train came, it was necessary to make myself particularly disagreeable to Mrs. Le Brune."

"Why so?"

"Because she thinks I am Jansen Moore, and Miss Sopha had written to her what an insufferable upstart Jansen Moore is. I tried to carry out the part as Miss Sopha had described me, or rather as she had described you. I am quite sure Mrs. Le Brune despises me heartily as Jansen Moore.

Jansen Moore groaned.

"Cheer up, boy!" cried Keeneyes heartily. "Don't you see the consequences? When you return to the house, Mrs. Le Brune, who has already mistaken you for me, will continue to believe you Keeneyes. She will endeavor to prevent my being with Miss Sopha, and this will throw you and the young lady together. This will give you an opportunity to prove to the young lady that you are not really the sentimental numbskull she took you to be at Banks, Missouri. So you see I have been doing you a great favor all the time you were thinking dark thoughts of me."

"Why, there may be something in that," cried Moore.

"Something in it? Everything is in it. It gives you a chance to act up for yourself. Of course, to the old lady you'll have to pretend to be Keeneyes, but to the young lady, who knows better, you will unfold yourself as a young man unfortunate but not wholly unworthy."

"Let's go to the house now," said Moore eagerly, "and try it."

"You will have a difficult part to play, Moore," said Keeneyes thoughtfully. "Do you think you will prove yourself equal to it?"

"I think I will," said Moore. "Come on."

"And you are no longer interested in knowing who tied you up last night?"

"Oh, I had forgotten all about that," said Moore with a short laugh. "Look here, Mr. Zellers, isn't it a fact that J. J. James had that done?"

"I infer that; but you may infer what you please."

"And his object is to drive me away—to scare me off from this mystery case?"

"It is a reasonable inference."

"Nobody can drive me away but Sopha Le Brune," said Moore. "But if J. J. James sent those rowdies out here, he must have been led to do so by the notes you wrote him in my name; so after all, Mr. Zellers, you are the first cause of my indignities."

"Not so, my dear fellow. Whenever a man undertakes to find the first cause of his misfortunes, let him look into his own heart."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Keeneyes, "that you should never have sought to match your skill as a reader of mysteries with Keeneyes, the Detective."

"Perhaps not; but I've come into this case, and nobody but Sopha Le Brune can drive me out of it."

"Moore," said Keeneyes, "if you will observe me, you will notice that I always refer to that young lady as Miss Sopha."

"And I speak of her and think of her as Sopha," returned the young man. "I dare say I'll miss her soon enough. Come, let's go to the house and have our first scene in this little serio-comedy."

CHAPTER X.

Keeneyes descended the ladder from the barn loft.

Jansen Moore came down more stiffly, but when he was upon the ground he felt his strength renewed.

"We will slip out by the rear," said Keeneyes, "and approach the farmhouse on a detour, in order that they may not know you have been sleeping in their barn all night."

"Sleeping!" repeated Moore ironically, but he said no more.

It was after eleven o'clock when they reached the country road without having been seen.

"I told them," said Keeneyes, as they entered the farmgate, "that you would not come back till night."

"I'll show them better," said Moore recklessly.

"Remember Miss Sopha knows you to be Moore, the man she despises, while her mother thinks you are Keeneyes, the man she admires."

"Now, Mr. Zellers," Moore remonstrated, "I cannot imagine that Sopha despises me; I believe when she knows me better she will find that she has misjudged me. Come, let us give her the opportunity."

They approached the farmhouse. It appeared deserted.

In answer to their knock, Mrs. Le Brune opened the door. She was surprised.

"Good morning, once more," said Keeneyes jauntily.

Mrs. Le Brune bowed constrainedly and said, turning to Moore, "Ah, Mr. Keeneyes, I did not expect your return till night."

"Unforeseen developments," said Moore, "have—er—have developed, madam."

They followed the lady of the house into the parlor. She asked eagerly, "Do you mean you have learned something regarding my uncle's death?"

"What can you have unearthed, Keeneyes?" asked Keeneyes of Moore.

Sopha Le Brune entered the room and looked down with the faintest shade of a bow on finding Moore.

"The fact is," said Moore, trying to assume the air Keeneyes had so often worn to his annoyance, "these professional ways and means are not to be speculated upon until the time is ripe—upon my word, Moore," he added, addressing Keeneyes in a patronizing manner, "until the time is ripe, my dear fellow."

Keeneyes grinned, and Mrs. Le Brune gave him a reproving look. She said to Jansen Moore, "You are quite right, Mr. Keeneyes."

Sopha Le Brune with difficulty concealed a scornful smile.

"In the meantime," said Keeneyes, "I see a piano of my favorite make. Who plays? Do you, Miss Sopha?"

"Yes," said Sopha Le Brune without any hesitation about it.

"I am going to ask a favor," said Keeneyes. "The fact is, Mrs. Le Brune, Keeneyes wants me to go mooning around the place looking for an old iron key, which he fancies somebody threw out in the yard some years ago."

"Then you should go," said Mrs. Le Brune stiffly. "I have engaged Mr. Keeneyes in this case, and whatever he wants done should be done. You will please go at once, then, Mr. Moore, if Keeneyes says so."

"I do say so!" said Jansen Moore to the detective. "Run along, my friend, and find that key; all depends upon it."

"But," said Keeneyes meekly, "I don't like to be wandering over the ladies' premises alone. It doesn't appeal to me as a proper thing. Miss Sopha, won't you chaperone me? Come and stroll, I beg of you?"

Sopha would like to have gone, but as she had written her mother that she despised Moore, and as her mother thought this Keeneyes was Moore, she hesitated in perplexity.

"Upon my word," cried Mrs. Le Brune, incensed, "if you wish a chaperone, Mr. Moore, I am of a more suitable age. I will show you about the yard. Sopha, play Mr. Keeneyes 'Meditation' while we are gone."

"Mother," said Sopha hastily. "I do not think there is any need for you to go with Mr.—for you to go with him. Stay while he looks for the key."

"But I can't go prowling about alone," said Keeneyes, twirling his mustache. "I should feel like an intruder. Come, madam,

(Continued on page fourteen.)

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"Yes, sir," remarked the self-made man, "brains come in ahead every time."

"Of course they come in a head," rejoined the cynical person. "I never heard of any one with brains in his feet."

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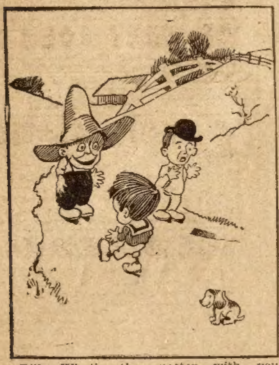
Madame Mignette's Beauty Cream and Skin Food removes every defect, spot, freckle, pimple, blemish or wrinkle, leaving the skin soft, clear and smooth. It is perfectly harmless and will not injure the most delicate skin. It preserves and brings back the youthful glow to the face and ruddiness to the cheeks, preserving it in this condition until extreme old age. This preparation has been used for years and hundreds are now using it and are more than delighted with the results.

Send us ten (10) cents for formula which you can have filled at any drug store at a very small cost. Do not delay, but write at once. Box 491, Blairsville, Pa.

Nothing New.

"I see that Gruet has taken a wife."

"Well, it won't be the first thing he has taken which doesn't agree with him."



Billy—What's the matter with you, Johnny?

Johnny—I've had so much lemonade that every time I swaller a piece of candy I can hear it splash.

An Improvement.

Weary Walker—De world's all wrong.

Tired Tatters—Wot's eatin' youse now?

Weary Walker—Ef I'd 'a' had de makin' uv it I'd 'a' made all de roads runnin' down hill.

Might Accept It.

"He is out looking for an honest dollar."

"But I notice he glances around occasionally to see if one of the other kind is trying to flirt with him."

In After Years

Anxious Mother—Little Bobbie cries for the moon every night. I don't know what to do about it.

Old Doctor—Oh, he'll outgrow that in time. When he grows up he will forget the moon and want the earth.

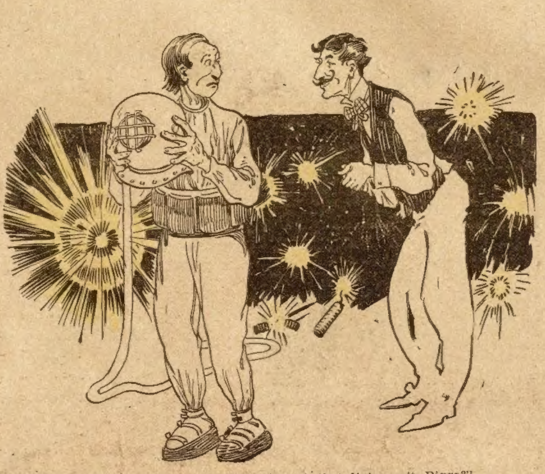
Hard Luck.

"My wife rifles my pockets every night."

"Just think of the poor Mormon."

"Yes; his wives must have a rifle match."

BOUND TO GET IT.



"What in the world are you going to do with that diving suit, Biggs?"

"Going to spend the Fourth in a nice, cool, quiet spot."

Curiosity.

Mrs. Pyke (in carriage with her husband)—George, who was that woman who just passed us and who gave you such a peculiar look?

Mr. Pyke—That's just what she will ask about you the next time I see her. Women are such curious creatures!

Possible Explanation.

An old hen was pecking at some stray carpet tacks in the back yard.

"Now what do you suppose that fool hen is eating those tacks for?" said Jones.

"Perhaps," rejoined his better half, "she is going to lay a carpet."

Might Drop Dead.

Oh, if I could only find
In my last summer's vest
A musty old two-dollar bill—
Well, you can guess the rest.

Knew the Effect.

"Were you ever in a railroad wreck?"

"No, but I have come home with goods three shades lighter than the sample my wife sent down with me to have matched."

A Dainty Little Maid.

Every one ought to have her. She is dressed in pretty colors and changes the color of her skirt herself when it is going to rain. She indicates when it is wise to take an umbrella or when you can do without. She is the simplest and best of barometers. She is an ornament, a good seller for agents, a pretty gift, a good business souvenir and useful to any one. She or one of her sisters comes postpaid with full directions for only 10 cents. W. P. Randolph & Co., 78 Dearborn St., Chicago.

Might Have Been Worse.

Links—I don't see that the hair-restorer has done you any good. You haven't a hair on your head.

Winks—Yes, but just think how much worse it might have been if I had never used the remedy.

In Its Proper Place.

John Bull—Oh, you Irish, you're forever putting the cart before the 'orse, don't ye know.

Mike Dunn—Yes, but we also put the "h" there.

Avoided Injury.

"Are you the gentleman who compiled that list of household remedies that every family should lay in against possible accidents on the Fourth?" asks the man with the mayonnaise whiskers approaching the desk of the answers-for-the-eager editor.

"I believe I am, sir," replies that individual.

"Then, sir, I wish to compliment you upon your foresight. Your advice saved my family from any injuries at all."

"I am glad to hear that."

"Yes, sir. By the time I had bought the arnica and the camphor and the bandages and the listerine and the first aid for the injured packages and all the rest of the stuff I didn't have any money left to buy fireworks with."

Hardest Part Is Over Now.

"Gladys, have you written your graduating essay on 'Modern Humanitarianism?'"

"No, but I've selected that for a subject, pa, and now I've only got to find out what it is."

The Important Thing.

Myrtle—Has your sister come to any conclusion about her essay for the commencement exercise?

Caroline—Yes. She is going to write it on blue paper to match her dress.

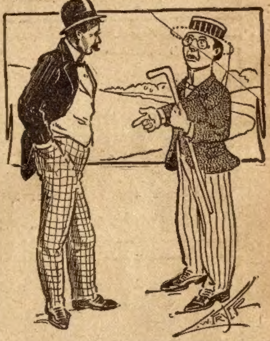
Dyspeptic Wail.

Ever since our marriage
I'm unhappy, don't you see,
For wifey does the cooking,
And her cooking's doing me.

Got Something Back.

When she decided—that's my girl—
To break love's airy fetters
She wrote, "I can't return your love,
But can your old love letters."

Nice Distinction.



"Do you think that man descended from monkeys?"

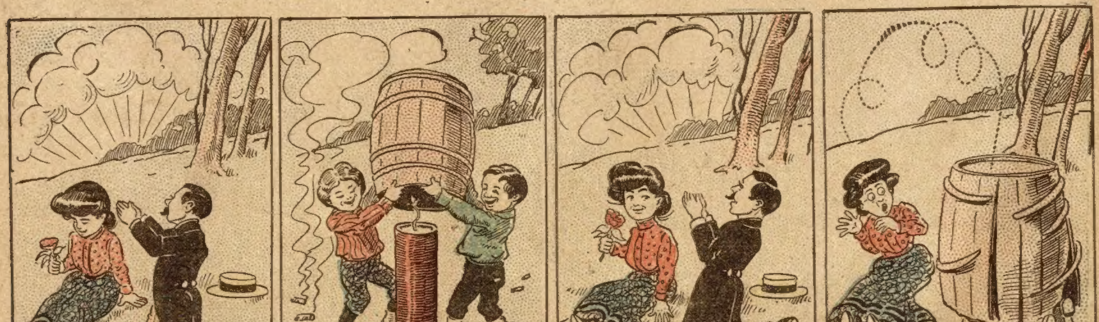
"Some descended, and some merely dress differently."

Somewhat Different.

Blox—I hear you have been visiting friends in the country.

Knox—You have got it wrong. I was visiting relatives.

PROPOSING ON JULY FOURTH.



ugustus—"Only say that you will be e and——"

The Boys—"Drop it over quick, and we'll give 'em a salute!"

"Nothing in the world shall (Boom!) come——

"Between us!"

JOLLITY

He Couldn't Understand.

"O," said the fair young thing, when the cannon crackers began to boom and the rockers to cleave the air, "these terrific noises always frighten me half to death. I always feel as though I must cling to some strong, sturdy protector, and——"

"How foolish!" observed the practical young man, whose name, by the way, was Lunkhed. "There isn't the slightest danger if you do not go too close to the explosives. Women are continually scaring themselves over a lot of trivial——"

But the fair young thing had pouted and excused herself, saying that she saw a friend across the lawn.

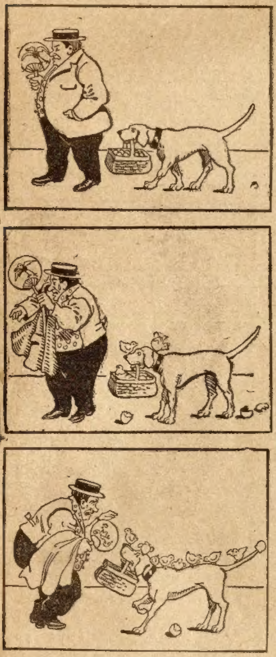
Later, in the rockets and red glare, Mr. Lunkhed saw her clinging like the ivy to the oak against a stalwart young man who seemed to be thoroughly convinced that she was frightened out of a year's growth.

No Job for Him.

Bleeker—Well, old man, how does the political situation strike you?

Seekem—Huh! I've been waiting for a political situation to strike me for the past twenty years, but there seems to be nothing doing.

Jones' Experience on a Hot Fourth of July.



Committed Himself.

"My dear Miss Oldegurl" says Mr. Batch, "I understand that you have sued me for breach of promise."

"Yes, sir," crisply responds Miss Oldegurl.

"But is there not some mistake?"

"Mistake? No, indeed."

"Why, you know, I never even mentioned matrimony to you."

"O, yes, you did."

"When and where?"

"At the Fourth of July exercises."

"At the Fo——"

"Yes, sir. Didn't you read Patrick Henry's address during the program?"

"I did, but——"

"And didn't you shout: 'Give me liberty or give me death?' "

"Of course, but I——"

"And wasn't I the goddess of liberty?"

The Village Gossips.

Silas Hardacre—Yes, every Tuesday and Thursday night is "rippin-up night" with the ladies' sewing social in this town.

City Drummer—Indeed! And what do they rip up?

Silas Hardacre—Carpet rags, pedigrees and the absent members.

In the Wrong Place.

Chapleigh—I say dwuggist, can you—aw—give me something to—aw—bwighten me up, doncher know?

Druggist—You're in the wrong place, young man. This is a drug store, not a night school.

Just Like Him.

"He is the most contrary man you ever saw."

"Really?"

"Yes. Why, he wouldn't attend his own funeral if he thought his friends desired him to be present."

At the Kennels.

"My, but that dog has an awfully short tail."

"Yes; but he's got a long pedigree."

Their Restraint.

Percy (gleefully)—Bah, Jove! All th' girls around here smile at me.

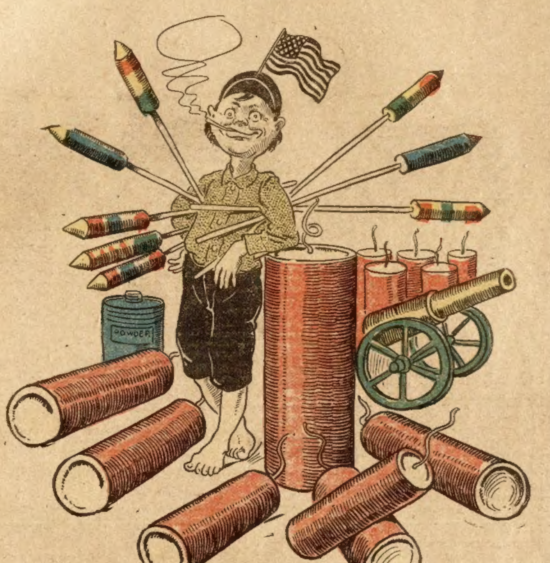
Jack—Well, that shows they have some manners. Anywhere else they would laugh outright.

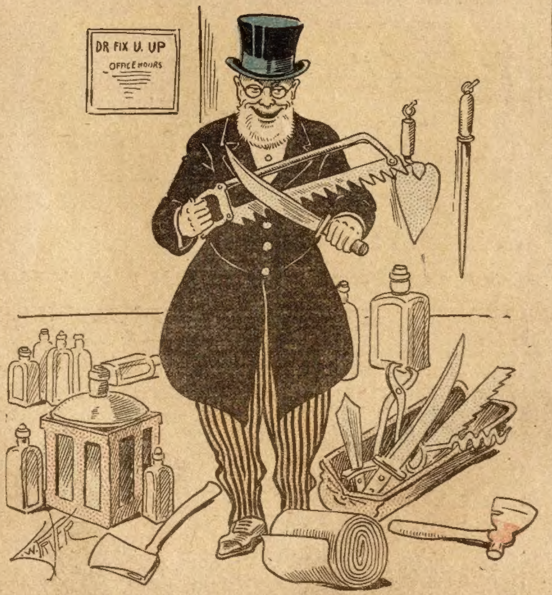
The Sorrow of It.

His Wife—If you had money enough to send me abroad for a year, I'd be happy.

Her Husband—And I would be still happier, my dear.

ALL READY!





Professional Advice.

Physician—You'll have to be careful this summer and not overexert yourself.

Patient—Then you think I ought to take a vacation, eh?

Physician—Certainly not. Didn't I just tell you not to overexert yourself?

Dead Write No Poems.

"Most people are not appreciated until after they are dead," sadly remarked the party with the unbarbered hair.

"That's right," rejoined the busy man behind the blue pencil. "They don't write any poetry then."

Down on His Luck.

"Shall I play one of your old favorites for you?" inquired Miss Quickrich, as she seated herself at the piano.

"No," replied Mr. Deadbroke, with a horse laugh. "Any old plug selling platter will do. All the old favorites I've had anything to do with lately have trun me down."

Greek to Him.

The city niece had induced her rural uncle to accompany her to church.

"Isn't our choir grand?" she queried.

"Yes," he replied, "but have you any idea what they are singing about?"

Too Fast.

A daring young man named Magoon
Fell out of a busted balloon,
He fell on his neck,
Exclaiming, "By Heck,
I reckon I landed too soon!"

AGENTS WANTED

Nearly all the readers of THE LEDGER will find these advertisements of interest to them. There will be found among them some excellent chances of making money by selling goods to friends, neighbors and others. Those seeking such an opportunity either as a regular or temporary occupation, should write the advertisers whose offers follow.

WANT MONEY?

Sell our Hand-Painted Palette Photo-Holder and Perpetual Calendar combined. Nothing like it on the market now, or has ever been before the public in the past. It's the prettiest and most useful novelty for the home seen in many moons. Sales are quick and profits large. Our agents are coining money. Terms and particulars free, or sample sent postpaid on receipt of 25c. BUCKEYE NOVELTY CO., Buckeye City, Ohio.

LEARN to make Mirrors and make big money at home. Partic. for stamp. MacMasters, D36, Peru, Ind

AGENTS, CREDIT, Perfumes, Flavors, etc. Big profits. Express Paid. Terms Free. HERBENE AGENCY CO., Box 282, Sta'n L, New York

AGENTS WANTED to sell the Celebrated Morris TRANSPARENT HANDLE POCKET KNIVES. Write for terms. Morris Cutlery Co., P. O. Box A Morris, Ill.

AGENTS make big money selling Gre-Solvent. Instantly removes machine grease, paint, ink, etc., without injury to skin. Every mechanic buys. Write for sample and terms. UTILITY CO., 330 Broadway, New York

SELL TOBACCO AND CIGARS. Locally or traveling. Salary or commission. Full time or side line. Steady work. Good pay. Promotion. Address MOROTOCK TOBACCO WORKS, Box S 13, DANVILLE, VA.

AGENTS PORTRAITS 35c, FRAMES 15c, sheet pictures 1c, stereoscopes 25c, views 1c. 30 days credit. Samples & Catalog Free. Consolidated Portrait Co., 290—80 W. Adams St., Chicago.

$18 to $30 WEEKLY Guaranteed Men & Women. Sell Watches, Jewelry, or appoint agents. Sample $10 Watch free. Don't wait until your territory is taken. Write today to UNION WATCH CO., Dept. 189, CHICAGO, Ill.

Fish Will Bite Like hungry wolves all the season if you use Magic Fish Lure. Best fish bait ever invented. You catch a big string of fish every time you go fishing. Write today and get a box to help introduce it. Agents Wanted. J.F.Gregory, 3319 Oregon Ave., St.Louis, Mo

WE WANT AGENTS

in every town to take orders for Custom-made Suits and Overcoats from $11.00 up, and Trousers from $3.50 up. Big commissions paid and large Sample Outfit in traveling case furnished free to those who can do business. You can make big money working for us. Write at once for Sample Outfit. The Warrington W. & W. Mills, Dept. 50, 173 Adams St., Chicago.

AGENTS WANTED

200 Per Cent Profit. Sell our Big $1.00 bottle Sarsaparilla for 35 cts. Best Seller. Finest Medicine. Complies With Pure Drug Law. Everyone buys. Write now for terms. F. R. GREENE, 27 Lake St., Chicago

SALESMEN WANTED.

Men who possess selling ability can get the most for it by representing us for the sale of our popular policies of accident and health insurance. Experience not essential. Exclusive territory, and active co-operation given to hustlers. Excellent openings and liberal terms for agents, collectors and district managers. Address, at once, Dept. 78, Continental Casualty Co., Chicago, Ill.

MAGIC BILL BOOK! An entertaining and useful article. Can be used as any ordinary pocket book. Sample by mail 15c. AGENTS WANTED. W. C WATKINS & CO., Box 1505, Pittsburg, Pa.

LOTS of MAIL

Would you like to get a lot of letters, circulars and packages? If so, read this advertisement very carefully. You probably know that manufacturers, supply houses, wholesalers and publishers buy names and addresses for the purpose of sending samples, advertising matter, papers and circulars to. Good names and addresses are hard to get and are quite expensive. We publish an Agent's Directory List containing names and addresses carefully arranged in alphabetical order. We send these Directory Lists to concerns we know are anxious for good names to send advertising matter to. The cost of arranging these names in suitable shape and taking care of them is considerable yet we only ask 10 cents in silver for our trouble. Write your name very plainly so the printer will not make a mistake; be sure to give your street number and town also plainly written so that any mail addressed to you will reach you without fail. Simply enclose 10 cents with your name and address as above stated saying you wish your name inserted in our Agent's Directory List and we will insert it in the next Directory which we are now preparing. AGENT'S DIRECTORY LIST, INDIANA, Indiana County, PENNA.

When answering advertisements you will avor the advertiser and the publishers by mentioning The Chicago Ledger.

TWO FACES UNDER ONE HAT.

By H. E. SCOTT.

Author of "The Pretty Typewriters," "The Girl from Nacoupin," etc.

[Copyright by the Author.]

Begun in No. 21, May 25. Subscriptions can begin with that issue or back copies can be obtained from news stands, or our agents, or by mail from office of publication.

CHAPTER XX.

"JUST WAIT."

"Congratulate me, Abner!" exclaimed Caleb, a moment later, when he had left Kate in the hall and entered the room where the farmer was seated. "Kate has promised to become my wife on the 15th of September."

"I foresaw it, Marsh," said Abner. "On the 15th, you say? Why, then Elwood's safe!"

"Without a doubt, neighbor, without a doubt!"

"Give me your hand, Marsh! This is the happiest hour I have seen for many a day! Kate! Kate!"

"Yes, father!" and she entered the room.

"God bless you, my daughter! Caleb has just confided to me the fact that you are his promised wife. A man who, because of his love for you, could be as kind to your old father as he has been for months gone by, can but be to you a kind and indulgent husband. I am very happy in your engagement, my child."

$3.95 GUARANTEED 20 YEARS

High grade genuine American full seven ruby jeweled watch, quick train lever escapement, a perfect beauty, guaranteed to keep correct time for 20 years. Fitted in richly engraved double hunting gold finished case. Positively the greatest bargain on the face of the earth. Cut this out and send it to us with your name, post office and express office address and we will send the watch and a beautiful chain to you by express for examination. If as represented pay express agent $3.95 and express charges and they are yours. Mention size wanted LADY'S or GENT'S. Address

R. E. CHALMERS & CO.
356 Dearborn St., CHICAGO.

The Handy Doctor in Your Vest Pocket

IT'S a thin, round-cornered little Enamel Box—

When carried in your vest pocket it means Health-Insurance.

It contains Six Candy Tablets of pleasant taste, almost as pleasant as Chocolate.

Each tablet is a working dose of Cascarets, which acts like Exercise on the Bowels and Liver.

It will not purge, sicken, nor upset the stomach.

Because it is not a "Bile-driver," like Salts, Sodium, Calomel, Jalap, Senna, nor Aperient Waters.

Neither is it like Castor Oil, Glycerine, or other Oily Laxatives that simply lubricate the Intestines for transit of the food stopped up in them at that particular time.

* * *

The chief cause of Constipation and Indigestion is a weakness of the Muscles that contract the Intestines and Bowels.

Cascarets are practically to the Bowel Muscles what a Massage and Cold Bath are to the Athletic Muscles.

They stimulate the Bowel Muscles to contract, expand, and squeeze the Digestive Juices out of food eaten.

They don't help the Bowels and Liver in such a way as to make them lean upon similar assistance for the future.

This is why, with Cascarets, the dose may be lessened each succeeding time instead of increased, as it must be with all other Cathartics and Laxatives.

* * *

Cascarets act like exercise.

If carried in your vest pocket, (or carried in My Lady's Purse,) and eaten just when you suspect you need one, you will never know a sick day from the ordinary Ills of life.

Because these Ills begin in the Bowels, and pave the way for all other diseases.

"Vest Pocket" box 10 cents. 737

Be sure you get the genuine, made only by the Sterling Remedy Company, and never sold in bulk. Every tablet stamped "CCC."

"The engagement is conditional, father."

"Conditional, child? How so?"

"I shall become the wife of Mr. Marsh, father, on the day he has stated, unless his mortgages are paid before that day."

"Then you will become his bride, dear! It is virtually an engagement."

"Just what I tell her, Abner. I think she but added the conditions to keep me on the anxious seat. She is not averse to becoming my wife; but girls will be girls, I take it. I am quite satisfied, and I am a happy man. She will be the fairest bride Lundy ever turned out, and until Arthur comes home and marries, our home shall be your home. When he settles at Elwood, you will have two homes. You must leave Elwood to him. I shall have a treasure I will prize more than I would a dozen Elwoods! Good-by! I must hasten home and gladden the heart of Sarah with the news that Caleb Marsh will not die an old bachelor."

A moment more and Caleb seated in his buggy was speeding homeward.

"Are you unhappy in this engagement, Kate?" asked the old man.

"Why talk of it, father?" was the reply. "I knew the time was near when I would be called on to decide. I think it would kill you to lose Elwood."

"Elwood? Lose Elwood?" exclaimed the farmer excitedly.

"Why, yes, surely. Should I refuse to wed Mr. Marsh on the 15th of September he would take Elwood from you."

"Then it is for my sake, daughter? All for my sake? But Arthur may come home before that date. If not——"

"If not, father, and the mortgages remain unpaid, I will become his wife. I—I may not be so very unhappy. At least, you shall not lose Elwood."

"God bless you, my child! I know Marsh will be very good to you. I would not have you sacrifice yourself—but Elwood! Elwood!"

"There, there, father, talk of it no more; the matter is settled. You are not to lose Elwood."

"Caleb Marsh has done much to win your hand, daughter. He has proved that he can be something besides a cold and cruel man. It was for your sake he extended the mortgages. I never dreamed that love, even for my charming daughter, could so influence him. I think you will be very happy. At least, you will be the wife of a wealthy man, and all your desires will be satisfied."

"Caleb Marsh, something has happened," said his sister, when he entered the house after arriving home, "and I think I can guess what it is."

"Yes, Sarah, I guess you can. The girl has consented. We are to be married the 15th of September."

"The girl's no fool, Caleb! She couldn't defer it another day. Ha, ha! You'd have foreclosed! Did she cry and take on?"

"Cry? Not a bit of it, Sarah. Have I not been for months trying to win her consent, willingly? I have got it, too; that is, with one proviso. In case the mortgages are paid before the date set for our marriage, the engagement is not to be considered binding. Oh, she must keep me on the anxious seat. But then, there is no danger of the mortgages being paid. The girl is mine and so is Elwood. And so is——"

"Well?"

"Ah, well, and so is she your future sister-in-law, Sarah; that is all."

"Well, Caleb, you have worked hard enough to obtain the hand of a penniless girl; but as you wanted her, I am glad you have got her; though you might have married a wife that would have brought you property. Elwood is in your clutches, anyway—but then I can't say anything. I plead your case mighty hard the last time I was there."

"Never mind about the penniless girl, Sarah—I'm no fool! I told you once I would surprise you one of these days, and I will. Just wait!"

"Caleb, I believe you love that girl!"

"I am rather inclined to think you are right, Sarah. I am, for a fact. She's young and handsome and sprightly. Why shouldn't I? But there is something else. Just wait!"

"In Heaven's name, what else is there?"

"You will have to curb your curiosity for a while, Sarah; but just bear in mind that Caleb Marsh's head has never been turned by love."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Sarah, "I will. Well, the girl is well enough, Caleb, and you'll be good to her, I know."

"Of course I will. I will have reason, too. Yes, and to her father. Oh, he swears by me now, and the girl says she wouldn't have believed once that she could ever have thought so well of me. Ha, ha! I have worked hard, yes, and spent money. I deserve the girl, and all that comes with her, don't I?"

"Yes, Caleb, you do; but I don't see as anything is coming with her but an invalid father. You will have him on your hands till he dies."

"Ha, ha! Just wait!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CALEB LOOKING AHEAD.

All too fast to Kate Ellis the summer months passed by. She had abandoned all hope of the mortgages on Elwood being satisfied save by her becoming the wife of Caleb, and his diamond ring now encircled the third finger of her left hand.

"If I am to become his wife," she had thought, "I should not show repugnance at wearing his ring." Yet as the days passed by, a feeling of horror grew up in her breast, that at times caused her to almost quake with terror.

Marsh was all kindness and concern for both her and her father. Many improvements had been carried on at Elwood, and the old place now looked as thrifty as neighboring farms.

The season had been favorable and the crops all that could be desired.

"Now, you see, Abner," Caleb had said, "you will be on your feet again. You will not only have a cleared title, but you will have your grainaries and barns full. Just the expense of threshing the crop out, and not a dollar else. The teams shall not cost you a cent, and I will give you a bill of sale for them and what stock I have placed on the farm, the day I am married. Oh, having a son-in-law that is forehanded will be no drawback to you, will it?"

"Caleb, you have been a son to me! You have made me a man again among men. Kate ought to love you."

"Oh, she will, neighbor, she will! I ain't sure but she does now. Why, I paid three hundred dollars for the engagement ring—not one like it ever encircled the finger of a bride in Lundy County."

"I can't understand how a cold, hard man like you—well, you know what I mean—like you always were, could have become so changed. Why, no man on earth could have been kinder or more considerate than you have been."

"Put it all down to love, Abner, all down to love! To my notion, there is nothing a man wouldn't do to please a woman he truly loves."

"Few have done as much, Caleb. So you and Sarah are going to take her to Chicago tomorrow, are you?"

"Yes. You see this is the 25th of August. Sarah will help her select her wedding gown and other finery, and, mind you, no expense is to be spared in that; then I must get my outfit. You know it takes time to rig up a bride, and it won't do to defer it any longer. You won't be alone long. You see, we will take an early train and be back on the night express."

"I should think, Caleb, you might find material good enough and expensive enough for both yourself and Kate in Coulton, for that matter. You never was given to style or dress."

"True, neighbor; but don't you see, I am about to take a young and handsome wife, and I am bound she shall not have cause to blush at the altar over either my appearance or her own, and then, you know, it ain't as though I couldn't afford it."

"I understand that, Caleb, and it shows how big your heart is, and argues well for the future happiness of your wife."

At eleven o'clock on the day following that of this conversation, Caleb Marsh accompanied by his sister, Miss Merton, a dressmaker of Coulton, and Kate Ellis, arrived in Chicago.

Miss Merton had been engaged to prepare the trousseau, and it was thought best that she accompany them.

Kate had been more than anxious for some weeks to visit Chicago. "There," she had thought, "lies my last hope, and that seems like a feeble one." So she had readily acceded to Caleb's proposal.

Numerous dry goods houses were visited, purchases made, and the goods ordered sent by express to Coulton.

It was near two o'clock when the party entered a restaurant on Dearborn avenue and seated themselves for dinner.

"How can I manage it?" thought Kate. "I must in some way. It is positively my last chance. I don't know as I should take advantage of it; but I would like to have it possible to do so. And I must be satisfied that he believes Mark guilty! Poor Mark!"

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Kate," said Caleb suddenly. "You seem deeply engrossed. Have you forgotten something?"

"I cannot go about here alone," thought Kate. "I will try."

"I have often thought, Mr. Marsh," she said, "that I would like to see and talk to Mr. Horton. I was thinking but now—can I, in any way?"

"Can you? Why, certainly, Miss Kate, certainly! I am glad you made your desire known. Miss Merton was just saying that the next point to be visited was a millinery establishment. We will let sister and her proceed there from here. We will visit Mr. Horton's office in the Board of Trade building, and join them after you have had your talk with Mr. Horton. I should be glad to see him also."

Kate was much pleased at the readiness with which Caleb found a way to carry out her wishes. "I am very thankful to you," she said.

A half-hour later they entered the office door. The old sign was yet above it—Horton, Baily & Co.

A smooth-faced clerk stood just within the railing.

"We called to see Mr. Horton, the senior member of the firm," said Caleb.

"Then you will be disappointed, sir," was the reply. "Mr. Horton and his family have been in Europe for the past four months."

"Indeed!" said Caleb, with evident surprise. "Then we shall be unable to see him."

Kate felt her heart sink in her bosom, as she asked: "When will he return?"

"Really, I am unable to state," replied the young man. "We have not been advised, but probably not before the first of November."

"November!" exclaimed Kate unconsciously.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing, nothing!" said Caleb quickly. "We wished to see Mr. Horton. We can only call again, after his return."

"Were—were you here in Mr. Baily's time?" asked Kate.

"No, miss, I have been with the firm but six months."

"Shall we go, Mr. Marsh?" said Kate, turning to him.

"I judge we may as well," was the reply. "I am very sorry you could not have seen him."

"You will never know how I regret it," thought Kate, as she realized that now her hand alone could clear away the mortgages that hung over Elwood.

"I could do no more, my dear," observed Caleb, as they were passing from the building.

"I am very thankful to you, Mr. Marsh, very."

At the millinery establishment they rejoined Miss Merton and Sarah, and here Caleb left the ladies for the purpose of making some purchases for himself.

"In this large city, somewhere," thought Kate, "I have an aged grandfather whom I have never seen. If I only dared search for him—but no, father would never forgive me. Ah, here is a directory."

While Miss Merton, Sarah and the milliner were talking, she perused its pages: "Eli Perrin," she ran one finger down the columns of names commencing with "P." The name did not appear there.

"An old man—he is probably dead," she thought. "And yet Mr. Marsh saw him last year. Well, his name is not in this year's directory. He has died since then—died, and left his money to public charities that would have enabled his granddaughter to bestow her hand where she would.

"Miss Kate!"

"Yes, Miss Marsh."

"Come, we must finish trading by the time my brother returns. You don't seem half interested for a coming bride."

"Oh, a large city quite confuses me. And then I rely more on your judgment and that of Miss Merton than I do on my own."

At five o'clock, when Caleb rejoined them, their day's shopping had been concluded, and they arrived at the depot in time for the six o'clock train.

"You will have the most elaborate outfit of any bride I have helped array, Miss Ellis," declared Miss Merton, as the cars were bearing them from Chicago. "Oh, you will be the envy of every girl in Lundy County."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Caleb. "Just what I intended, and I flatter myself that when I stand beside her at the altar my old friends won't know me. I have ordered a wedding suit, the sight of which will astonish the natives of Lundy, especially, when they see it on Caleb Marsh. Ha, ha!"

"Why, brother, what on earth is the matter?"

"Nothing, Sarah, just wait!"

It was ten o'clock when the train drew up to the Coulton depot, where Caleb's carriage was found in waiting. After bidding Miss Merton good night, he assisted his sister and Kate to enter it, entered himself and the vehicle whirled away.

Arrived at Elwood, Caleb conducted Kate to the farmhouse door, rejoined his sister, and settled back in the carriage as the driver mounted to his seat.

"I am glad the day is over, Sarah," he said, "very glad. I was anxious to give Kate an opportunity to see Horton before the 15th, and I did so; that is, I took her to his office."

"And she saw him? He refused to lift the mortgages?"

"Saw him? The man was in Europe!"

"And you knew it?"

"The party that visited Chicago today, Sarah, would have stayed home had I not known it. I am no fool! I was looking ahead—I didn't want the girl thinking at the last minute that Mr. Horton might lift those mortgages if appealed to! Now there is but one contingency that could arise to thwart me, and that never will. Arthur Ellis is dead!"

"Oh, he must be! I guess Kate thinks so."

"Yes, I think she has given him up, but on her father's account she still claims to be expecting his return."

"Oh, there is no danger of your losing your bride now. She ought to be the happiest girl in the county."

"Do you know how much money I am worth, Sarah?"

"Why, you were saying last week that between us we were worth all of two hundred thousand dollars."

"Sarah, I am worth eight hundred thousand dollars in my own right!"

"Impossible, Caleb! This love business has turned your head."

"Just you wait, Sarah!"

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

One hundred miles northwest of Denver, in the Medicine Bow range of the Rockies, two young miners on the 10th of April, 1887, in a peculiar manner located a mining claim from which in three short months alone and without the aid of machinery, aside from picks, bars and the usual implements for surface mining, they easily secured a fortune.

One of these young men was the same John Merrill, who, on that September day, six months before, on the bank of Cherry Creek and within the corporate limits of the city of Denver had read from the columns of the Coulton Record an article proclaiming a reward for the apprehension of one Mark Perry, the murderer of Philip Baily, the Chicago packer.

It will be remembered that John Merrill tore the paper into shreds and casting the fragments on the surface of the stream walked rapidly away.

Ten days later, with a miner's outfit, he was prospecting in the Clear Creek gold fields.

"Here," he thought, "I shall meet no living soul that ever gazed on the features of Mark Perry. Here I can safely strive for the accumulation of a fortune, and await the time, if it ever comes, when the man for whose crime I am an exile shall be apprehended."

How little does man know what the fates have in store for him, or at what moment, when he fancies himself amid new surroundings and among strangers, a familiar face may appear before him, or a well known voice sound in his ear.

Here was John Merrill, hundreds of miles from the scene of the tragedy of the 14th of September, buried in the mines, and little dreaming that ere ten short days had passed a name would be sounded in his ears that would startle him—his own! Yet, so it was.

He had staked out a claim on the 10th of the month; but after five days' toil without even the glitter of a grain of gold to reward his efforts, he concluded that his selection of a site had not been fortunate, and on the morning of the sixth day he [illegible] his pack mule and through the broken defiles of the hills bore away in a northerly direction in search of a more promising location.

At night he built his campfire in a sheltered nook, staked out his mule, and with his trusty rifle beside him awaited the dawn of a day which was to bring with it a startling surprise.

It was the morning of the 17th, and early he was astir. He had left his night's camp three miles behind, and was walking along, picking his way, with his trusty rifle on his shoulder, his mule following almost in his footsteps, when suddenly, rounding a boulder, he came full upon a stalwart young man, who, clad in miner's togery, with the sleeves of his woolen shirt rolled above his elbows, his hat fallen off lying on the ground beside him, was lustily swinging a pick.

John Merrill saw at a glance that this young man was just commencing the development of a claim. "Changed his location, as I am doing," he thought. "He doubtless camped here last night for the first time."

"Good morning, friend!" he exclaimed, as he laid his hand on the bridle rein of his mule and halted before him. "You are striking lusty blows there."

"Good morning!" returned the young man as he loosened his hold of the pick and glanced at the newcomer. "Yes, I find hard blows necessary here, and it is a question if they will tell. This is the third claim I have staked out in the past sixty days, with never a sign. I don't like this section for surface mining though some have good luck. I suppose you—Heavens, man! But no—yes, yes; thank God, it is Mark Perry! Do you not know me, Mark?"

The man had rushed forward and seized him by the hand.

"Why, Mark, Mark. What ails you, boy—you are as pale as death? Are you not glad to see me? I have been a sorry dog; but I love the dear ones at home as well as ever, and it is for their sake that I am striving here in the mines. [illegible] my old schoolmate. But tell me, Mark, why do you glance around so [illegible]? [illegible] Do you bring [illegible] from home? [illegible] you seen them? Say, Mark, [illegible]——"

"Hush! Hush, Arthur! Are there others here?"

"Why, no, Mark, no; but if there were—what then?"

"My name is John Merrill, Arthur, John Merrill! Do you hear? Mark Perry is a fugitive—but not from justice. Do not pronounce that name again—the trees or rocks might conceal auditors. The [illegible] it to the ears of those who, for the reward, would [illegible] Mark Perry back to an undeserved death on the gallows. Oh, Arthur, Arthur!"

John Merrill's arms encircled him, and his form shook with emotion.

"Little did I dream that I should encounter here the brother of my lost darling! You will not—cannot betray me, Arthur?"

"Betray you, Mark, dear boy? I fear you are insane! If not, my life on your integrity! But tell me, tell me! The brother of your lost darling—I do not understand! I am dying with suspense! Surely, you can trust me, Mark, your old schoolmate! Come, sit here beside me—my campfire still smoulders, and the coffee is yet warm. Tell me, Mark, tell me! May I unpack your mule? You can go no farther now! You, you, here in the mines! But father—Kate? Can you tell me aught of them?"

"God bless you, Arthur, for your faith in me; but it may be shaken. I will tell you all."

"There, the mule is unpacked. I will tie him here, and afterwards we can stake him out with mine. Oh, Mark!"

"John Merrill, Arthur! You know not what your use of the old name might consign me to—the gallows!"

"Oh, no, no! You are laboring under some strange hallucination."

By this time these two young men, who had been lads together, were seated by the fire.

"First, Arthur," began John Merrill, "I last saw your father and my promised bride, sweet Kate, on the 14th of September. I left your father well, for him, and bonny Kate's features beaming with happiness."

"Thank God for that, my friend!" exclaimed Arthur. "I have often hoped, Mark," he continued, "that you and Kate might one day wed."

"God bless you, Arthur; but I pray you, do not address me by that name. Henceforth I am John Merrill. You will soon see that with me a change of names was imperative. Now listen."

Here John Merrill commenced a recital of all the events that had transpired in the life of Mark Perry from the time he left Elwood, five years before, to the time of their unexpected meeting not an hour previous, concluding with a description of the scene at Sandy Run when he was confronted by Marsh and Cleaver, only to be denounced as the murderer of Philip Baily.

"Now you know all, Arthur," he declared, "why I am a fugitive, and why I am henceforth John Merrill. Is your faith in the integrity of your old friend shaken? Do you believe him worthy of your sister's love, or does the overwhelming evidence against him cause even you to shudder in his presence?"

"John Merrill!" cried Arthur, grasping his hand as he brushed aside the tears that had gathered in his eyes, "I have followed your every word! My life on the integrity of Mark Perry! He is worthy of my sister's love! Poor, dear Mark!"

He cast his arms about the form of his companion, and John Merrill's head found a resting-place on his bosom.

"God bless you, my friend! I have at last found one who believes in my innocence."

"Oh, there are others, Mark—ah, John Merrill! Kate, surely, has never wavered, and my father will not lose faith in you. Marsh, who gave you the files and counseled you to use them, would not have done so had he doubted your innocence. And then Doctor Doan and Horton——"

"Do you not see, Arthur? Mark Perry's flight, it will be argued, was equal to an admission of his guilt. It was a fatal mistake. Marsh meant all for the best, but he exiled Mark Perry forever and rendered it impossible for him to clear his name or bring to justice the guilty wretch for whom he suffers."

"I never would have believed that cold-blooded Marsh would have cared whether you lived or died. Why, he had but to help convict you to have removed you from his path. The villain, to attempt by reason of my father's misfortunes to coerce Kate into becoming his wife. And yet you tell me that he has extended the mortgages. I am surprised at that, if he could have gained anything by foreclosing."

"Marsh professed great friendship for your father. He assured me that he was my friend, and that if I did not flee I would surely be hung. He pictured to me the grief of Kate, and told me that the guilty party, who you will remember, obtained the ten thousand dollars that Mr. Baily had in his possession, as well as his watch, on the [illegible] of which his name was engraved, would [illegible] be apprehended.

"'[illegible],' he said, 'he may be convicted [illegible], and even on the gallows [illegible] to Baily's murder. There is [illegible] but for a dead one there is none.'"

"He displayed good judgment there."

"He further stated that [illegible] become my wife. 'Of course,' he observed, 'I tried to win her, but I am too old for a [illegible] young girl to mate with. I realize it now. I will extend the mortgages and give them a chance.'

"I stated that Mr. Horton, I thought, would yet take them up, and he promised to talk with him. He stated that he ran a great risk in aiding in my escape, and so he did. Oh, Marsh showed another side to his character."

"Yes, [illegible] to save your life [illegible] in furnishing the files was surely criminal. Perhaps we should blame him for wishing to make Kate his wife, but the methods he resorted to were not unlike the man. I am more surprised at his later action—I cannot understand it! I supposed there was but one side to the old skinflint's character, and now it seems that there are two.

"I am thankful that he sent you that paper, for now we know that he did extend the mortgages. And for that he deserves our thanks. He may have been right. I do not wonder that you listened to him. Why, the testimony of the scoundrel Dobbins alone would have convicted you—unfortunately he heard but half your sentence.

"Be brave! You have a friend in me who will stick to you to the end. And now let me relate my experiences since leaving home. Of course, I left there with a view of accumulating money with which to clear my father's farm from the mortgages that [illegible] over it. I had heard so much of the [illegible] fortunes made in a short space of time on the Chicago Board of Trade, that I induced my father to confide five hundred dollars, nearly all he had, to my hands.

"I ventured this money on one of those certain deals in wheat that broke [illegible] discover, with the result that I was left nearly penniless. I wrote home as bravely as I could, but I was desperate. I could think of but one resort left, and that was the mines. I worked my way to Colorado, and here I have been ever since—most of [illegible] trails, and all of [illegible] until such time as I had good news to write."

"[illegible] that love you have been nearly [illegible] at not hearing from you," said John Merrill, "[illegible] yet look for your return, [illegible] of the improvements to be inaugurated at Elwood when you return. Oh, he expects you to come home a wealthy man!"

"Bless his heart, and so I will, when I do return; but my fortune will have to change. I have never yet struck a claim on which I could more than subsist, and I could never bear to write. Better, I thought, wait until I have sufficient means with [illegible] home, then walk in on them [illegible] and dispel all their gloom. And now that I know that for two years my father will not be pressed for that money, I shall continue in that [illegible]. He can surely rent out the land for money enough to defray their expenses."

"I sent Kate three hundred dollars from [illegible]," said John Merrill.

"You could think of them at such a time? Oh, Mar—John Merrill!"

"You know I told you I had six hundred with which I had expected to pay the interest. I wished Marsh to take five hundred, but he would take no more, though he promised that they should not suffer."

"I have a higher regard for Marsh than ever before; but I am glad he would take no more."

"He thought I would need it in making my escape."

"Well, I have about three hundred dollars' worth of nuggets and dust. I thought of trying to send that, but now I will not. We are together, and we will stay together. We will stake off another claim joining this one, and perhaps fortune may smile on us. If not, we can but try elsewhere. Some day we are bound to strike a rich location, and when the time comes I will go back East a rich man and spend a fortune but that I will get to the bottom of that mystery—clear your name and have you triumphantly come back and claim your bride."

"God bless you, Arthur! New hope springs up in my heart; but let me beseech you to write just a line informing them that you are well, and bidding them to hope. You know I dare not, nor must you mention me. Do not even mention the name of Mark Perry."

"I think we had best wait until we have met with some success. You say my father looks for my return. We will give him a joyful surprise before another year goes by. The dear ones are well and safe—we are in the same condition. And then, my letter might be the means of bringing detectives here on your trail. It might be thought you had joined me. I presume mail to my father will be watched closely. We can take no chances now."

"You may be right, Arthur. And yet——"

"I must have my way in this, John Merrill. Elwood is safe, and father will keep up hope."

"Oh, it would kill him to lose Elwood! How his heart is bound up in that place."

"It has long been his pride. You see his father preempted it of the Government, and somehow he feels in honor bound to transmit the place to me, though I must say I have not his attachment for the old home. Why, my boy, when we go East we will have the means to purchase a dozen Elwoods. Cæsar's ghost, here it is two o'clock! I will get dinner and then we will stake out a double claim instead of this single one.

"While I mourn for your misfortunes, I rejoice that I have a partner, and that partner is my old friend and schoolmate."

"My heart is lighter than I could have believed," said John Merrill, as the two young men leaped to their feet, "and I love you, Arthur!"

"As well as you do Kate?" asked Arthur with a laugh.

"Oh, well, now——"

"Next to Kate! Well, my boy, you are both young and can wait. All clouds will be dispelled, and I shall dance at your wedding within two years. Here is the water [illegible] and there is the path to [illegible] Will you [illegible]"

[illegible] the bucket and dashed off.

"A partner, and one according to my own [illegible]!" exclaimed Arthur, as he [illegible] retreating figure. "And he [illegible] well as he does my [illegible]! There never was a [illegible] Mark Perry's head, and he is [illegible] me, but I [illegible]. Oh, well, I [illegible] father [illegible] to [illegible] all come out in the wash!'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEAD MAN'S GULCH.

Our two young partners, thus strangely [illegible], were not destined to find a fortune in the Clear Creek gold fields. The claim we left them developing proved [illegible]; their [illegible] several times, and with a like result. The long winter [illegible], nor had they added much to their store.

The night of the 10th of April, while sitting by their campfire, Arthur [illegible] exclaimed: "John Merrill, old boy, I am [illegible] of a longer jump. I feel that we will meet with no success here. What say you [illegible] the Bow Range? We will [illegible] travel to reach it, but I [illegible] there is a better showing for [illegible] mining."

"I am agreeable," was the reply. "We can't well [illegible]."

"True! In the morning we will break camp and start."

The afternoon of the 19th of April, the third day since they had entered the range, or rather the foothills of the range, they were passing up a broad gulch that served to divide for a distance of several miles the mountains that loomed up on either side.

Suddenly, at about two o'clock, they came upon another gulch, running nearly north and south, that converged into this one.

They were crossing it, when Arthur exclaimed: "This gulch does not extend [illegible] far. Observe, you can see the black body of the mountain beyond. Let's explore this smaller gulch before we go farther."

They had advanced into it parhaps a half-mile, and had just rounded a boulder [illegible] there was an exclamation of surprise from the lips of John Merrill.

"What is it, John?"

"There! Look there!" was the reply. "A human skeleton!"

Arthur turned his eyes in the direction indicated. Sure enough, there, not ten feet away, lay the grinning skull detached from the frame of which only the bones were left.

"Some luckless prospector who met his fate while seeking to better his condition," said Arthur. "Poor fellow! See, there is his rusty pick and spade. There by the boulder he had his fire. He may have been murdered—though, perhaps, he died a natural death. There is no evidence that [illegible] had been digging for gold. Let us camp here, and place his bones beneath this rocky surface. Some one may do the like for us some day, but I hope not."

"It is a good place to camp," said his companion. "There is plenty of water."

The mules were soon unpacked and tied out, a fire built, and the ground inspected.

"There is nothing to identify him by," said Arthur. "No rifle, no cooking utensils. He must have been murdered and then robbed."

"Perhaps he had a companion," said Merrill, "and the companion took the outfit and left when he died."

"What, and the body of his friend exposed? Impossible! Well, we shall have a hard time to hide his bones. Let us see what we can do."

John Merrill had already stripped off his coat and seized his pick. About five feet from the skeleton he brought its sharp point down.

Arthur had secured a bucket and stepped to the sparkling stream that was babbling along the bottom of the gulch, and when he returned with it filled he found that his friend had made some headway, for quite a quantity of yellow soil and gravel had been upturned.

In passing his partner he stumbled and fell, upsetting the water bucket on the newly upturned earth. He scrambled to his feet, and in doing so his right hand, which had rested on the mixture of gravel, clay and water, brought up between the first and second fingers a peculiar little nugget imbedded in the clay.

"Merrill," he cried, "if there is any water left in the bucket will you turn it on my hands? There, so. Why, what is this? That is no ordinary gravel."

The last vestige of the clay was soon washed away, and he held the nugget up between himself and the sun. The next moment a glad cry escaped Arthur's lips.

"Eureka! John Merrill, we have found it! Found it here in Dead Man's Gulch. It is a nugget of gold, and my word for it, there is more here. We may have made our last camp."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Merrill, in an excited tone of voice; "but are you sure that is a gold nugget?"

"Sure? Yes, there can be no doubt!"

"Our bony friend cannot lie there. Let us place him carefully up against the boulder and let him rest until we have washed out what you have upturned."

"God bless his poor [illegible]," said John Merrill, "but for discovering [illegible] we should not have made this find."

Our two heroes set to work with a will, and ere the sun had set a computation was made that they had washed out nuggets to the value of four hundred dollars.

Their miners' shelter was [illegible] against the protecting boulder, [illegible] late in the night th[illegible] sleep and dreams, [illegible] unhappy ones.

All night long Dead Man's Gulch was yielding up its golden [illegible] and [illegible]. The mules were watered and [illegible] where there was better browsing, coffee and flapjacks were prepared, which our expectant friends disposed of with greater haste, and seemingly greater relish, than they had [illegible] for many days. The white bones of their predecessor were carefully laid to rest, and with a will they set to work again.

Each day, as it passed, now added rapidly to their store, yet still they labored on. Their firearms furnished them game on which they principally subsisted, though at times one of them would mount his mule and ride to the nearest mining camp for supplies, for which he would exchange a portion of their gains.

An excavation had been opened beneath the pole flooring of the shanty they had constructed and in it every night the proceeds of the day's labor were [illegible], the poles relaid, their blankets spread over them, and thus their bed was virtually one of gold.

May, June and July passed, and still the placer gold of Dead Man's Gulch came forth almost at their bidding; but they were in many places down to bedrock.

"I don't know how we are to get our wealth to Denver," said Arthur, one evening about the middle of August after they had retired. "Our two mules cannot bear the burden, [illegible] to walk [illegible] there. I [illegible] if we could land it safe in some Denver bank and I could reach home a year from the time you made your exit from that jail. What do you say to my making a trip to Golden Gulch tomorrow, purchasing stores and picking up a couple of extra mules? Then you can accompany me to Denver where we will bank our funds, and I will take a train for home, while you return and hold the claim until I either join you or being able to clear your name, send for you."

"I like the plan, Arthur. I think it is high time you were off for home. How I long to hear from Kate! And yet, at times I almost fear to. But should we both leave here at once, even for a trip to Denver?"

"Oh, we can burry the tools, and make the claim look like one that had been abandoned because it would no longer pay to work it. We must have secured at least one hundred thousand dollars. I feel as you do, that it is high time I relieved the anxiety of my father and sister. I may not be able to ascertain who murdered Philip Baily, but I can gladden Kate's heart. How do we know that the real murderer has not before now been apprehended?"

"God grant it! Our success here has almost driven everything else from our minds, but believe me, Arthur, not a night

(Continued on page fourteen.)

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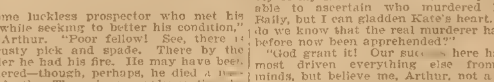

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CHAPTER X.

WHERE WINTER REIGNS.

As soon as they found themselves free from the raging elements, and soaring upward like a bird, both voyagers seemed to remember that even in these clear regions they were far from being safe.

Instinctively they cast their eyes upward, and in a southerly direction.

They were not long in discovering the object they sought.

It astonished them to see what a distance had been placed between their rival and themselves during the time they were among the clouds.

Really, their progress must have been at a rate faster than any railroad train ever ran.

No doubt when they dropped into the black depths below, their enemies considered them as dead to the world.

There was not more than one chance in a dozen of their ever coming out of the situation alive.

No doubt upon discovering the sky wanderer emerging from the waste of clouds, the professor and his companion were amazed.

They would soon be forced to believe these young aeronauts possessed charmed lives

Still, the superior sailing qualities of the new balloon would in due time enable them to overtake the pursued craft.

Once above it again, the same tactics could be put into operation to force them into a repetition of their dangerous sail among the clouds.

Bob understood this.

It accounted for his making no movement to stay the upward flight of the gas monster as it mounted higher and higher.

Now they were on a level with the other balloon. Pete looked at his companion.

Bob appeared quite unconcerned, and gave no evidence of a halt.

How high could they go and live?

Down on the earth the air was hot and sultry as became an August day.

They were shivering with the cold, and little Barbara was only too glad to wrap the blanket about her.

It was a wonderful sensation this soaring in space, with the earth blotted out by the clouds below, and can only be appreciated by those daring souls who have ventured forth in the frail vehicles of sky transportation

The day will come, is almost here in fact, when the people of this country will think nothing of going from New York to Chicago by daylight, and through the air.

Greater wonders than that have already been done and more marvelous things are coming at the hands of Santos Dumont and his fri[illegible]

To-day the submarine vessel of Jules Verne's fertile imagination is an assured reality.

Nothing is impossible with the genius of science. Hence, let us wait, and hold our breath.

When the young voyagers had mounted to a position considerably above the level of the other balloon, Bob checked their ascent.

Then they drifted on.

As was expected, the pursuers gained.

In an hour they had decreased the distance to one-half.

Bob knew of no way in which he could change the condition of affairs.

When, however, he saw his enemies start at their old trick and toss out ballast, he was determined that the same game could not be played twice with impunity.

As a consequence they began to once more mount upward.

Pete obeyed orders without a word, but he soon slipped on an extra coat.

The cold began to grow intense.

It was easy to understand why snow remains on the tops of certain mountains all through the year

There is no time when at this distance above the earth from the poles to the equator, that the mercury rises above freezing

When the two men saw what they were doing there was doubtless much astonishment on their part.

The atmosphere was losing much of its vitality, and they had to breathe like the panting deer after being chased by Adirondack hounds

It was folly trying to outdo a couple of reckless boys in a matter of this kind, who perhaps did not even know the danger involved

Besides, there was Pete amusing himself by popping away with his rifle.

True, the distance was so great, and the circumstances under which he fired so peculiar that there was small chance of his striking anything, but at least his action proved the boys to be fully aroused.

They had stood enough of this thing and were ready to strike back.

No doubt a consultation or council of war was hurriedly held.

The upward movement ceased.

In spite of all the clothes they could pile on, the cold was so intense, and their chances of arousing their stagnant blood so poor, that they must not only suffer dreadfully, but freeze to death unless the opportunity was embraced to drop to a lower position.

While they considered, the balloon of the professor was advancing toward the other.

Perhaps the whistle of a piece of lead which Pete sent toward them aroused the two plotters to a sense of their danger.

Something must be done.

Pete had a gun with a longer range than their own, and to reply was to waste time and take new chances.

They began to experience some of the trepidation that had been up to this time monopolized by the more youthful cruisers of the upper air.

To ascend was out of the question, and unless they did so their bombs were useless.

Only one other thing remained.

This was to go down.

The storm had broken below, and through the scattering legions of clouds they could catch glimpses of land and water, making a scene as near like a master painting as words could describe.

When Pete cried out that the other balloon was falling, his companion smiled grimly, and pulled the valve string to allow a certain amount of gas to escape.

Thus they fell in company.

The region of the clouds was reached.

How much more comfortable—after all the earth was a pretty good place for its children.

Pete pulled off his extra coat, and coaxed Barbara into viewing the lovely landscape

They still continued to descend, so that while their view became more circumscribed, the features of the landscape stood out more clearly.

Finding that all the while the others had kept gaining Pete got out his gun again.

"Give 'em a shot across their bows as they do at sea, as a warning to come to," said Bob.

The other did so.

It was understood, for while the downward motion of the pursuing craft ceased, a strange drag appeared in the rear, looking like a parachute on end, which catching in the breeze, kept them from advancing too rapidly.

"What's that they're waving?" asked Pete.

"A white flag."

"Surrender, eh?"

"Hardly that. Rather they want us to quit firing on condition that they keep their distance."

"A shrewd game. Their gun won't carry this far, you see. Well, what shall I do?"

"Nothing."

"I'm sure I can punch a hole in their silk."

"Don't do it. Our case is no longer desperate. The day is near an end—we are not victims of a storm, nor do we fear their five messengers."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Watch for a good opportunity and stretch our legs upon the surface of old Mother Earth again."

CHAPTER XI.

ANCHORED IN MICHIGAN.

It was to be wished, for although not twelve hours had elapsed since their first bound upward into space, so much had happened since then, and such was the distance they had traveled that it seemed ages ago that they stood upon solid ground.

Pete welcomed the proposal with a grin, and even petite Barbara seemed to become more like herself when she learned that the first stage of their balloon voyage was over or at least drawing near an end

The fact that Signor Carasina was with the other air vessel gave her uneasiness.

She seemed to feel that he was pursuing her for the purpose of completing his work—of late it had been as though the Italian had grown to hate the very sight of the child, although her face brought to his mind some evil that had a bearing on his past.

The sun was drawing near the horizon, and in a short time twilight would settle over the northern world

If they expected to find a good place for landing, now was the time to do it.

Bob let a little more gas escape, and they sank nearer the pine woods.

"Look! there are some people near those cabins. Why, they look like ants. I can see them grow as we draw nearer," cried Barbara, clapping her hands at the joyous prospect of soon reaching a firm footing.

"See them wave their arms. It's a great day for Squawdunk when two balloons pass over," remarked Pete, with equal enthusiasm.

Bob was watching

He saw that their rivals had also dropped to about the same level, as though they did not mean to be left in case of a landing.

"Pete, how is your gun?"

"In good working order. Shall I drop 'em now?"

"Oh! no. I didn't mean that. Is it fully loaded, the magazine part?"

"No, about half, I reckon."

"Then I'd fill it up."

"See here, you don't expect these Wolverines will attack us? They know better than to take us for a big rok, the bird that carried off Sinbad the Sailor."

At this Bob laughed outright.

"They're all right, but it's these parties I mean to watch. See how they follow us."

"I think it would be a good idea to fire another shot across their bows and make them go down. Then we could put some miles between, and be our own masters."

"Try it and see, but be careful not to hit them."

Pete let go, and the smoke, together with the report, not to speak of the singing lead, told the men in the rear that they had again crossed the danger line.

They chanced to see a fair opportunity to alight just at this time, and on the spur of the moment the professor accepted it.

Being an adept at the business, of course the old aeronaut managed this affair with credit, and the last our friends saw of them, the balloon was bobbing along with the evening breeze, and half a dozen stout yokels hanging onto the anchor rope that had been thrown out for this very purpose.

It was time they began to look for some such place of deposit themselves, since night was coming on, and once darkness began to blot out the features of the landscape below, their difficulties in case they determined to alight, must be easily multiplied.

They were in the vicinity of a town.

Occasional cabins could be seen as they drifted along, in which lights were beginning to appear.

This region is given up almost wholly to lumbering, and the advent of two balloons in one day was enough to arouse the keenest interest among the honest people, many of whom had never seen such an airship before. Even the parachute professor had not invaded this country with his show

As they skirted one end of the village, Bob saw a chance to make a landing.

It looked like an open campus or commons. The opportunity was too good to lose.

Pete had stood in readiness with the grappling iron, and at a word prepared to throw.

As for Bob, he allowed more gas to escape.

With the hissing sound the balloon began to fall rapidly.

"Now!"

Down went the grappling iron.

It had four prongs, and could hardly drag along the ground any distance without seizing upon something that would stay their progress, in the shape of a log, or a rail fence.

Several men had come plunging through the trees like mad

Chasing a balloon was a new experience and one not down on their calendar.

To them Bob shouted, and presently they were swinging to the line, laughing and tumbling about like a pack of boys at school

More gas escaped—Bob was quite reckless of it now, and although Pete said nothing he wondered how under the sun they were going on the back track, since the balloon could never be filled again in this wilderness

His trust in Bob was complete, and he was quite willing to let the future take care of itself.

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SATURDAY BLADE

It is beautiful to have such faith in another, and saves a heap of worrying.

This last act of Bob's brought the balloon to a stop—indeed, they came near being spilled out upon the ground, and there was much laughing as they scrambled to maintain their equilibrium.

The balloon was secured to some posts that fortunately happened to be near, and some rocks placed in the basket to take the place of their weight, making the strain on the ropes less.

Bob would not abandon his craft at once. He explained that there was danger of malicious persons attempting to do it an injury.

As much of his story as he chose to tell aroused the indignation of the honest lumbermen, and when he expressed his desire to hire several of them to guard the Sky Traveler during the night, they were all ready to speak at once.

When three had been selected, they went back for their guns, and after seeing them on duty the boys felt tney could rest secure.

One thing bothered Bob.

Perhaps the Italian might claim Petite Barbara.

He declared to be her father.

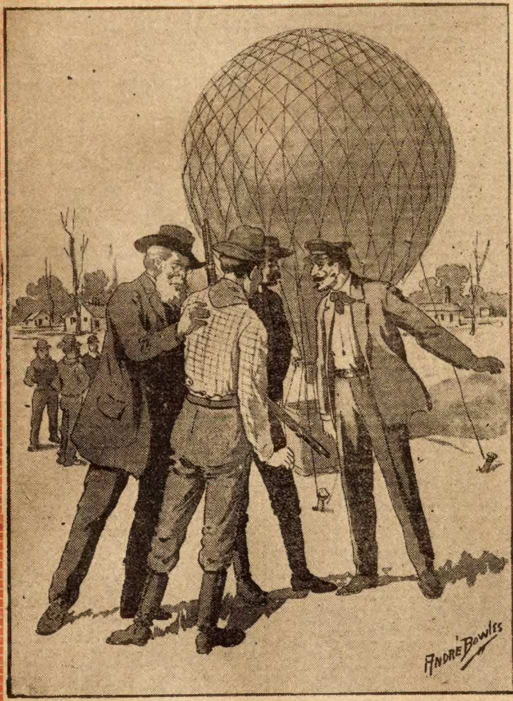
The law would be on his side.

So Bob made inquiries, and was delighted to learn that the marshal of the place, the only official who could do anything was at Lansing with a prisoner.

Signor Carasini would call in vain upon the strong arm of the law to restore his child.

Straight to the house of a leading man the young aeronauts and their girlish charge went, followed by an enthusiastic crowd.

It was a great day, for Pine Knot, as the lumber town was eloquently named.



They told a great cock-and-bull story.

Here supper was prepared, and they were treated as guests of honor.

The daughter of the house was a pretty girl who interested Bob from the start, because she seemed to unite so many of the good qualities that go to make up an excellent woman in due course of time.

Pete was not wholly in the counsels of his companion, and allowed the latter to do most of the talking.

Indeed, he generally referred all seekers after information to Bob.

He knew the latter had waited for a certain favoring breeze because it was his desire to come north rather than be wafted to the east or south.

That there was something back of this he knew full well, and patiently waited for his comrade to explain.

Bob did not have his head turned by the attention he received, being far too sensible for that.

His thoughts were with the balloon, since it was the vehicle he meant to use in the carrying out of his plans.

Pete heard him ask many questions concerning the adjacent country, and of the region around Macinac. That is was not idle curiosity that impelled this course on Bob's part he knew full well, and he wondered all sorts of vague things, even to speculating whether his companion hoped to discover a gold mine up in the copper region.

Later on they walked over to the campus.

Bob was worried.

He knew the unscrupulous nature of the Italian, and perhaps imagined that the other could give a shrewd guess concerning the nature of his mission to this land of pines.

They found the guards on duty, patrolling the open space with guns on their shoulders, as though regularly enlisted soldiers.

They had news to relate.

Before the boys had been gone half an hour two men appeared, strangers to them, but who answered the description given of the aeronaut and his companion.

They told a great cock-and-bull story, accusing the lads of all manner of evil things, and offering the guards double pay to let them destroy the balloon.

This attempt to buy their allegiance aroused the indignation of the lumbermen, who had been greatly taken with the frank, ingenious faces of the boys, and felt an instinctive dislike for the men, particularly the velvet voiced Italian. They told him plainly that they were not to be bought—that they had promised their assistance to Balloon Bob and his chum, and were ready to prove the fervor of their allegiance by ducking the men in the creek near by if they attempted any mean trick.

Thus matters stood at the time our boys returned.

The men had hauled off, baffled but not defeated.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VOYAGE RESUMED.

Naturally Bob was well pleased with such a showing from his faithful allies, nor did he hesitate to warmly thank them.

They had contempt for men who would adopt such cowardly tactics as those brought into play by the two plotters.

Living a simple life, they possessed a keen love for fair play, and it would go hard with the signor and his companion in case they tempted any of their miserable work around here.

Bob busied himself about the basket of the balloon, while Pete watched curiously.

The great silk bag still stood up, but enough of the precious gas had escaped to cause it to lop over considerably.

It was evidently not buoyant enough to carry the three of them above the tree tops.

How then did Bob propose to accomplish this thing in a region where gas was unknown?

That was a puzzler to Pete.

He saw his companion open a small box, holding the lantern carefully.

There were revealed many small globes of some material.

Bob took one in his hand.

"This is divided into two sections, each of which contains a separate acid. If I break the globe, the acids unite and form a very powerful gas, even more buoyant than that taken in retorts from coal. Each little bomb can be counted on for so many cubic feet of gas. So you see, having made all preparations I can easily fill out the balloon.'

So saying he removed the lantern to a distance, put one of the globes in an arrangement under the neck of the balloon, crushed it, and immediately occupied its place with another.

When these had been sacrificed the balloon seemed to have recovered all its old time vigor and was tugging away at its anchorage with the impetuosity of a war horse senting battle smoke.

This piece of business revived all of Pete's great faith in his friend.

He was ready in his enthusiasm to back Bob against the world.

They no longer felt like amateurs, after the long and exciting cruise so lately finished, which doubtless had few superiors in ballooning annals.

Bob was not yet done.

As he and Pete sat there on the edge of the basket he said:

"I think the time has come when you should know the true reason of this trip, old fellow. You believe it is only a spirit of adventure that has sent me here. True, I longed to go far up above the clouds and experience the joys that come to the aeronaut as he sails through azure fields with the earth at his feet.

"There was another motive. I have hoped to unveil the secret that has always been upon my life—to discover who I am."

Pete nodded his head in a knowing way—after all it was better than a gold mine. He felt the deepest interest in the success of his friend's mission, for although he had never found occasion to feel any particular pride over his father and mother, from whose stern fostering care he had decamped when but a small chap, still he could appreciate the misery that must accompany an utter lack of knowledge with respect to one's identity.

"I learned enough some time ago to make me wild to visit a certain section up in the peninsula of Michigan, a place where this same Signor Carvasini visits occasionally, and where I believe I shall find some one to claim me."

"What has that dago to do with your past?"

"More than even I suspected until lately. When my eyes were opened I began to lay little traps and experiment. I was successful in finding out many things. They made me long to know more. Step by step I have come on. Pete, do you know why I jumped so eagerly at your proposal that we rescue Petite Barbara from his hands?"

"I—that is, you had a sympathetic feeling for one whose condition resembled your own."

"More than that—go deeper."

"Eh? what can you mean?"

"The same man hates us both, and is mixed up in our past."

"Yes."

"Even you remarked that we looked alike."

"Jerusalem! can it be possible?"

"I like to look at it in that way—to believe I have at least found some one in whose veins runs the same blood as in my own."

"A sister—your sister?"

"Heaven grant it may be so; but we shall know all in good time, and if my mission prospers it will not be many days before this grand rascal is exposed."

"Well, Bob, I wish you every success. If it turns out as you say, it'll be just jolly. You've got the balloon ready—when do we skip out?"

Bob waited before answering.

"The wind has a great deal to do with that. It seems to be working almost from the south now. A point or so nearer the east will fetch us."

"Unless they put a stop to it?"

Bob shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll try and prevent that."

"How can it be done? A gun will bring us down in a hurry.'

"When we go back to our friends I'm going to get their assistance. I rather think they will see to it that the gun is not fired. Up in this region they do things in a peculiar way, and unless our friend the professor and his Italian passenger want to grace some pine limb in this region they had better toe the mark and walk straight."

"Will they follow us?"

"I don't doubt that, when they are given the chance."

"But their balloon is hardly in condition."

"Ah! I learned that little dodge of the gas balls from the professor, so you see he is up to all the latest discoveries in that line. Oh! yes, they will come along when our friends the loggers give them permission."

"Let us return to Barbara."

When they had communicated with some of the men, various plans were suggested.

On the whole it was decided that when the young aeronauts were ready to ascend, some of the lumbermen, being idle at this time of year and ready for anything to break the monotony of their life, would go to the spot where the rival balloon was fastened.

Both men would be put under surveillance and if any desire to injure the boys was shown, rough treatment would follow.

As a last resort the professor and his companion would endeavor to ascend, but in some way this must be prevented.

Trust a crowd of reckless, fun loving lumbermen for finding a means to detain the pursuers until those they hunted had a long start.

Sleep had not visited our boys much of late, and they were glad to lie down.

At three o'clock Bob was up.

He found the breeze very light, but the clouds were moving in exactly the quarter he wished.

That settled it.

Pete was aroused, and the whole house astir.

Bob suggested leaving Petite Barbara with these kind friends, but she would not hear of it.

They went to the balloon, accompanied by the entire household—indeed, the signal had been passed along, and it soon became apparent that the whole village was astir.

A balloon ascension was an event of tremendous importance with these good folks, and to have two occur, without any charge of admission, was quite enough to arouse every inhabitant.

So with an audience of sympathetic people around, they prepared to go aloft.

Bob made inquiries concerning those whom they had reason to fear, and received such intelligence as caused him to smile.

There was little danger to be apprehended on that score at present.

So they thanked one and all for the kindness shown, gave the word to let go, and with the vociferous shouts of the assemblage, shot upward into the gray light of early dawn.

Fainter grew the shouts from the dark earth below, and at length they ceased entirely.

All around was complete silence.

The sun peeped up over the horizon, even while the surface of the earth below was wrapped in darkness.

At length morning came to the world underneath.

They drifted lazily on, the air being sluggish.

No signs of the other balloon could be seen, which fact amused the boys not a little.

It proved that the lumbermen had kept their word, though it was impossible to say whether they were simply detaining the aeronaut's balloon, or putting the two men through a sweating system on account of

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what they may have attempted at the time our friends quitted the campus.

It was very pleasant.

They ate the breakfast which Barbara's new-found girl friend Molly had put up in a splint basket, and their appetites were rendered particularly keen by the crisp atmosphere through which the course of the balloon took them.

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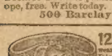

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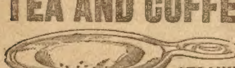

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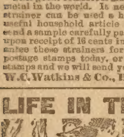

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After a while their progress became more rapid.

They were not so high but what they could see the distinguishing features of the country below.

Noon came.

Bob was studying a map closely.

"Never heard of such luck," he declared, about two o'clock, "a bee-hive from start to finish."

Pete looked curious.

"Where do we land?" he asked, surveying the map.

"No need of that. Look away over yonder. Take the glass. What do you see?"

"Flags and banners of all kinds, and buildings.

"Do you recognize the sight?"

"Looks like a county fair, I declare."

"Just so. That's Grantsville and the fair is in progress. We are heading for it. I propose to land right in the middle of the grounds. Watch us drop down. That is where my mission calls me."

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Upon the Fourth day of July
We get our auto and we fly
Across the land in booming style,
Careening on for mile and mile.
And why is it that thus we go?
Because we love our country so.

Some of us also seek the field
Where curves and inshoots are revealed;
We whoop and yell and madly root
As down to third the runners scoot,
Why do we cheer the batsman's blow?
Because we love our country so.

Some of us find the picnic grove,
Which is as hot as any stove,
And there we view with startled eyes
The ants and spiders in the pies.
Why do we gather freckles? O,
Because we love our country so.

Still others sit within the hall
And hear the famous speaker bawl
In fiercely patriotic moods
The same time-honored platitudes.
And why is this? Ah, you must know,
Because we love our country so.

The Death-Key Mystery.

(Continued from page seven.)

I hope you will bear me company, and as it's late, we might as well stay to dinner, I suppose—eh, Keeneyes?"

"Certainly not," said Moore angrily. "We will return to the town to dinner. Pray go look for that key, Moore, that we may not detain the ladies any longer than necessary."

"Daughter," said Mrs. Le Brune, "play Mr. Keeneyes one of your most brilliant studies when you have finished 'Meditation.'" She went out with Keeneyes. Through the window Jansen Moore could see them slowly walking through the grass. It seemed at first almost too good luck for him to be left alone with the young lady. It almost seemed an unnatural and forced situation, though in truth, it was perfectly true to life; for what condition of events may not be forced to an issue in order that a fond mother may have her daughter perform before the distinguished guest?

At first, we say, Moore regarded this tete-a-tete as almost too good luck. But when he covertly glanced at the face of the piquant little blonde, he was not sure but the luck was ill. Her face wore a look which indicated a long and difficult road to her favor.

There was a moment or two of profound silence. Sopha made no motion to go to the piano.

"Miss Le Brune," said Jansen Moore, "your mother thinks I am Keeneyes."

"I received a telegram from him," Sopha interrupted, "asking me not to undeceive my mother—that the deception was necessary; I cannot imagine why; but I am obeying instructions, though with difficulty."

"In the meantime," the young man began——

"In the meantime, I know you are Mr. Moore; and when we are alone, if we should ever be so again, I need not pretend to treat you otherwise."

"Unfortunately," said Moore, "your mother mistook me for Keeneyes when I first——"

"Yes," the other interposed, her blue eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing in displeasure, "she told me she read my letter to you; as she supposed, to Keeneyes; and you let her read it to you."

"In that letter—" Moore stammered.

"I have no reason," said Sopha cuttingly, "to alter the opinion expressed in that letter. Shall I play for you?"

"But hear me only for a moment," cried the young man in despair. "It was your mother's own mistake that I was Keeneyes; she insisted upon it, and there wasn't any way to fix it up. She got out that letter and it told the bad impression you had formed of me. I wanted to know what it was. I wanted to hear what you had against me. I had to know; and so I couldn't speak up and say, 'Don't read it to me, don't tell me, I am Jansen Moore. Don't you see? I couldn't, you know. Because I was interested in knowing my faults as you saw them."

"Indeed?" said Sopha, smiling unkindly.

"Yes, that I might correct them.'

"You thought, then, that it was gentlemanly to listen to a letter meant entirely for another."

"Of course it wasn't," said Jansen Moore humbly. "I know it wasn't. But at the time I didn't think of that. I only wanted to know your opinion. There are times—crises in one's life—when other considerations appear of more vital importance than the mere fact of acting like a—in the conventional manner, as it were."

"Oh," said Sopha slowly, "do you mean sometimes a gentleman is not a—" She paused.

"All rules have exceptions," Moore said, "and the conduct of life has more than any other. One should never listen to other people's private letters. But here was a letter upon which depended my——"

"No true interests of your life," said Sopha decidedly, "could have depended upon hearing my opinion of you."

"But they could, Miss Sopha; they could—they did—they do."

"In that case," said the young lady, lifting her face toward his in her most aggravating manner, that is to say with her most charming provocative flash of the blue eyes, "you should have asked me, and not gone to my mother in a false character."

Jansen Moore hung his head.

Sopha seated herself at the piano. "I will play 'Meditation,' she announced, "and follow that by one of my most brilliant studies."

Her little hands sank into the first chords of the composition and nailed them, as it were, to the piano keys until the last juice of music was squeezed out of them. Then she reached for the next.

Jansen Moore watched Keeneyes upon his knees in the yard, thrusting an iron stake here and there into the long grass, while Mrs. Le Brune looked on sternly, as if keeping time over a man-servant. He felt he was losing time and opportunity.

"Miss Sopha," he said, "can you talk while you play?"

"Yes," said the young lady, "but I cannot listen."

Jansen Moore shifted himself to the other foot. Sopha sent a shower of notes flying from the keys as if casting cold water upon her companion.

"Well," said Moore, "please talk to me, then, for I am the most miserable fellow in the world."

Sopha, still playing, said slowly, "Justly so."

"I think," said Moore, "that hearing what you wrote your mother was punishment enough for listening."

"Your ideas of the degrees of punishment are inadequate."

"Won't you forgive me, Miss Sopha?"

"Forgive you? Certainly. What do I care about it? It is the way you ought to think about it—and don't—that makes me—but let us meditate."

When she had finished "Meditation," she immediately spoke: "Now we will have my most brilliant study." She tucked down her little head, made a dive for the instrument and came up through waves and foam of clashing noises.

"O, Miss Sopha!" cried Moore in something like a wail, "your mother is coming back! It will all be over in a minute."

"What will be over?" she asked, stopping her execution in astonishment.

"My—er— this chance to—er— to make you think better of me. Please think better of me. I—I—Miss Sopha, I can't go on having you think this way of me. I—I would do anything to show you I am not what you consider me. Let me prove to you that I am a good enough sort of a fellow—let me show—I would do anything to gain your good opinion."

"Would you?" said Sopha looking at him intently, as if she found him a good deal of a puzzle.

"I would!" cried Moore. "Yes, I would—oh, your mother is coming!"

Sopha laughed out. "Why shouldn't she come?"

Jansen Moore wrung his hands.

"If you really want me to think better of you," said Sopha slowly, "though I can't imagine why you should take so much trouble for a stranger—but if you want a chance to redeem yourself, go to my guardian——"

"Mr. J. J. James?" inquired Moore ruefully.

"Yes, go to him and tell him the whole truth. Tell him how you listened to the letter, and let mother think you Keeneyes—and in short, everything about you since coming to Whiteoak Farm; everything."

"But he—" Moore stammered.

"I have always been mortally afraid of him," said Sopha, "and I warn you he is a man who does things. He was my guardian until a week ago. Go and tell him of your conduct."

"And—but—last night—he already has tried to——"

"Of course," said Sopha coldly, "you must do exactly as you please about it.'

She rose from the piano stool.

"I'll do it!" cried Moore desperately. "I'll go to him, I'll tell him."

"If he kills you," said Sopha cruelly, "I'll have you sent back to your friends."

"I have no friends," said Jansen Moore grimly.

"To your relatives then."

"I have no relatives living," said Moore. "I have only myself, and that is much more than I have been able to take care of."

"That sounds like an excuse for getting into trouble."

"I hope it is partly an excuse, for I have been in real trouble."

"I think," said Sopha with sudden sympathy, "that in a lonely life, one is more apt to make mistakes."

"Especially," said Moore, "if the one you are alone with—I mean yourself—is a weak character at the vital moment."

"You must not take that so much to heart," said Sopha gently. "Don't think of the wrong you did any more than is good for you."

Just then Mrs. Le Brune led in Keeneyes as if delivering up a prisoner.

"No key," said Keeneyes cheerfully, twirling his false mustache in imitation of the mustache Moore had once worn.

"By the way," said Sopha suddenly, looking at Moore, "I thought you had a——"

"But we must go now," said Moore hastily. "If anything develops, trust me to keep you informed. Come, Moore, you have spent a fruitless morning; you are not making the detective I had hoped to fashion out of you. You are too slow; and you think too much of yourself to put your whole mind on your duties."

"This is crushing," murmured Keeneyes.

"It is discipline," said Moore severely. "Come along!"

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Two Faces Under One Hat.

(Continued from page eleven.)

has passed that I have not seen Kate's sweet face before me in my dreams."

"And this gold, my boy, is to clear your name, if it is not already cleared, and unite your fond hearts together."

"Go in the morning, Arthur, and in your absence I will try and disguise our claim enough to answer our purpose. You must leave Denver prepared to lift those mortgages and place your father in easy circumstances."

"Never fear, John."

Early the following morning Arthur was off.

At the noon hour of the day following John Merrill was seated in the shanty door companied by shouts.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet.

At this instant the form of a bareheaded man, on whose features were depicted terror and despair, with a cry came tumbling down the almost abrupt cliff on the opposite side of the gulch and sunk with a splash beneath the waters of the creek.

John Merrill seized his revolver and in a moment's time was up to his waist in water, dragging from the rapid current the half drowning form.

As he pulled him upon the bank, the faces of several men appeared on the brow of the cliff.

"Is he dead, partner?" one of the men cried out.

"Dead? No!" shouted Merrill. "But in God's name, what means this?"

"We will be with you in a moment," was the reply, "and finish him. If he had not fallen in the creek, we would have been saved the trouble."

Here the forms on the cliff disappeared.

"Help me! Save me!" cried the trembling wretch, as he attempted to struggle to his feet. "They will murder me!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, God! I'm lost, lost! My leg is broken! Help, help! Hide me! Hide me! Quick, quick!"

"Why, you are wounded," said Merrill, "blood is oozing from your shoulder."

"Oh, if it had only killed me! Help, help! They will hang me!"

"Not unless you deserve it," said Merrill. "I will not see an innocent man murdered, never fear. First they will have to take my life. I know what it is to be falsely accused."

"Bless you, sir! God bless you! But wounded and with a broken leg! My ankle struck that ledge half-way down the cliff. Don't let them hang me! I am not guilty! It was not I that killed him!"

"Liar!" shouted one of the men, as six of them came rounding the side of the cliff twenty feet to the right. "You murdered one of the best men that ever lived! Where is there a cottonwood? There is one! Your rope, Carr! Quick! From the noose we will soon have him dangling in between the earth and sky."

The man addressed as Carr, a brawny miner who held a coil of rope in one hand, rapidly formed a noose, and strode forward.

John Merrill leaped between him and the quaking figure on the grass, with extended weapon.

"Halt!" he cried. "This man shall not be murdered in my presence, unless you prove to me that he is guilty of the crime you charge. Why, he is wounded and helpless. It were cowardice to murder him. Give him a chance to prove his innocence. At least, give him a fair trial, even if before Judge Lynch."

"You are taking big chances, young fellow," said the one who had first spoken, and who seemed to be the leader. "There are too many here for you; but you look straight and all right. I see your shanty there—a prospector, I take it. Rest a bit, Carr. I will satisfy the young chap. Search that whelp, he may have arms."

"My revolver is in the bottom of the creek," said the wounded man, "or you'd have found it out. Oh, save me! They will lie to you!"

"There were eight of us prospecting back in Timmon's Gulch, three miles west," said the leader. "Three of us were brothers. My name is Jo Wells. This man here is my brother Jim. Charley, the youngest, the one we promised our old mother, back in Ohio, to guard and protect, lies back at Timmon's Gulch, a corpse, and this is the murdering hound that killed him.

"He came to our camp not ten days ago and plead sickness. We took him in, and in three nights as many of our fellows were robbed of their dust. We suspected him, but could not swear to it, and would not accuse him on suspicion, but before dawn this morning the hound stole into the shanty where we were asleep—Charley, with the dust under his head. As he was pulling the bag from beneath his head the boy awoke.

"He seized one of the villain's arms and gave one cry—it was his last. With his other hand this wretch drove the keen blade of his dirk home to poor Charley's heart, withdrew it, and dashed away, bearing the bag of dust with him.

"Jim and I leaped to our feet in time to catch sight of his flying form. We both fired, and then it was that he was wounded. He dropped the dust, but in the darkness we lost him."

(Continued on page fifteen.)

A MOST REMARKABLE THING.

A very remarkable thing
  I sing
Concerning Aurelius Blye.
He furnished his girl and his boy
  Much joy
With fireworks the Fourth of July.
Firecrackers, torpedoes—that's what
  He bought—
Skyrockets and candles of Rome,
Inventions productive of hums
  And bombs,
And fountains of fiery foam.
He carried them into his lot
  And got
Some matches for touching them off.
He said: "I will show you right now
  Just how
The rockets should set in the trough."
The children declared they were glad
  Their dad
Would make all the fireworks explode.
Aurelius bent over to scratch
  A match,
And just how to strike it he showed.
He smiled: "See the flame. It pursues
  The fuse
Until it gets into the charge,
And then with a vigorous whizz
  It is
A-romping the heavens at large."
The children exclaimed in delight—
  The night
Was pierced by the rocket that rose.
They set up the merriest shout
  About
The sputtering sparklings and glows.
He fired off the lot one by one—
  Such fun for
The children there never was known.
He didn't blow off with a bomb
  His thumb,
Get burned and in misery groan.
And so this remarkable thing
  I sing
Concerning Aurelius Blye
Whose children were glad that he
  Shot the lot and
They never murmured. That's why!

The Damnation of Father Fitzgerald

(Continued from page five.)

to answer this question in my own mind?" he thought. "But this is the last time—I must be positive. I must make no mistake."

At last turning again to the bed he took the feverish hand between his own and said:

"You are making it very hard for me, Agnes."

"Mercedes has more wisdom than yourself, let her decide," fell from the lips of the sufferer.

"That is unfair and does not do credit to my manhood, Agnes," he answered, as his quick eye caught the startled glance and rapid breathing of the young girl who stood looking on and listening to this dramatic scene, while her happiness hung in the balance. Love pulled him both ways. Finally he yielded to the stronger impulse.

"Agnes," he said very tenderly, "for the reason that I think you do not understand what and how much you are asking, and that you are deceived in your condition, I am going to tell you that I cannot make you this promise. When you are better we shall——"

"You are killing me," murmured the woman, and turning her head aside motioned him away.

Fabian dropped on his knees beside the bed, while Mercedes kneeled at the foot. When they rose, he said:

"Agnes, have you no further word to say to me, can't you——"

He broke off and looked anxiously into her face. Mercedes stepped quickly forward.

"She is dead," whispered the frightened girl.

"She sleeps," he corrected. "It is either the sleep of death or exhaustion, I know not which. Call the nurse."

"The doctor will return directly. I will watch until he comes," said the nurse. "You might step into the other room for a little while."

Fabian motioned Mercedes to follow him, and with the eyes of the officers constantly upon them, the lovers, who were so greatly tried, went and stood in the adjoining room, Mercedes sobbing violently.

"I think you should have promised, Fabian," she moaned.

"It was hard deciding what to do, Mercedes. I do not believe, though, in deathbed requests and promises. It is unfair to the living and to the dying. The latter are too weakened mentally to judge of what they ask. It was supreme torture for me to deny her anything at such a moment. Perhaps she will be better within a few days and I may convince her that she is wrong."

"I fear she will never regain consciousness—that she will not recover. I believe this to be her last sleep and she will never again open her eyes in this world. If she does, Fabian, you had better promise."

"No, I cannot, Mercedes, but God knows how I suffer."

"Then I must, Fabian—I must promise her not to marry you, and keep my promise. It were better for us to suffer than to deny her this last request. Please do not try to dissuade me, Fabian, it is such a great moment to her. If she dies, she will be comforted. If she lives, she may release me. But humor her, we must."

"I think you are wrong—absolutely wrong, Mercedes. Weigh every word and act at this time."

With breathless, prayerful hearts the two continued to stand with clasped hands waiting for some intelligence from the sick room. After an hour had passed in suspense, the nurse came to the door and called to them:

"She has come out of the sleep, but her moments are numbered. She desires to speak with you again."

Mercedes tightened her grasp on Fabian's hand and whispered:

"Be brave, Fabian—I—I must grant her request."

Now entering the room the two stood by the bed expecting to listen to a last appeal. Instead, the dying woman smiled up into their faces and murmured:

"I know now that you are right, Fabian. I was wrong. I have been away from this earth since I talked to you. I saw Andrew—was clasped in his arms. It meant a glimpse into the beautiful Eternity where I am going. I now understand how your hearts are bound. Forgive me for trying you so greatly. Guard and love Mercedes always, Fabian. My blessing upon both your heads."

With this, the invalid relapsed into a state of coma once again and after a little while all was over.

Though sorely grieved at their loss, the lovers were much relieved to have the blessing of the dying one and realize that she was happy in her last conscious moments.

"Who was Andrew?" questioned Mercedes when a little later the priest rose to take his departure.

"The man she was to have married. He died a few days before the day set for the wedding."

It was with a breaking heart that Mercedes now watched her lover handcuffed and led back to the carriage that waited in front of the house.

He was going back to his prison cell—perhaps to his death! Ah, what a house of mourning!

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Two Faces Under One Hat.

(Continued from page fourteen.)

"Don't believe him, friend! Don't believe him! It was not me!" cried the prostrate wretch.

"We returned to the shanty," continued Jo Wells. "Charley was stone dead, and clutched in one hand was this bit of cloth. As you can see, it is part of the coat sleeve of Charley's murderer. Look at him now! Are you satisfied? All hell can't save him! We roused the camp as soon as day dawned and trailed him. Finally we started him from a deserted claim—he ran this way. You know the rest. We are judge and jury in this case. Stand aside, young man! Carr, noose him and we will drag him to the cottonwoods!"

John Merrill stepped from before the wretch he was shielding: "Take him," he said, "he deserves it!"

"Help! Help!"

The tightening of the noose silenced his cries, as the strong arms of the miners dragged him towards the cottonwoods.

"Best learn his name," thought Merrill.

"Mr. Wells," he said, "the villain must die, but it might be well to learn something of him, then we can notify his family, if he has one."

"Such a brute can have no family," replied Wells, "but he gave his name as Philip Baily, though it may be a false one."

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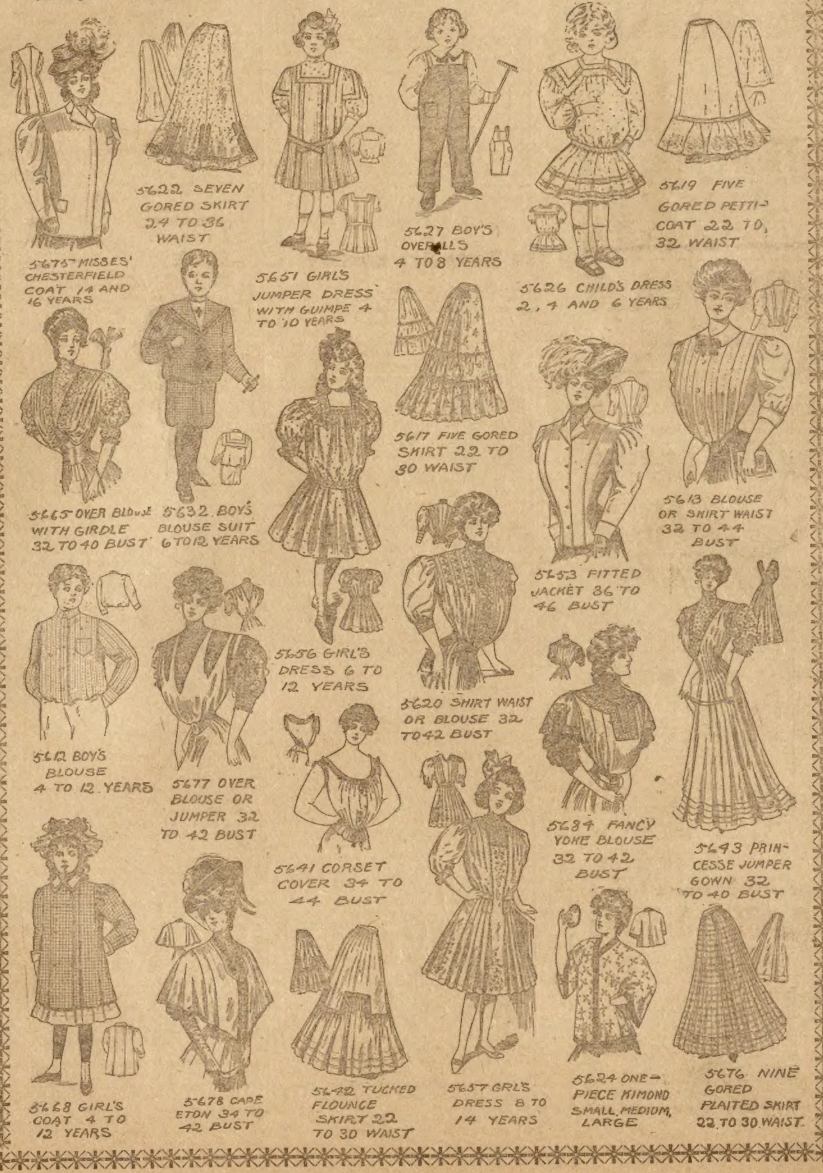
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FOR YOUTHFUL EYES

MR. JULY.

"I'm Mr. July; I belong to the boys;
They're so glad I've come—just hear all the noise.
Torpedoes and crackers go snap! bang! or fizz!
While rockets and candles go up with a whiz!
The year is half over when I come along!
It is just in its prime, so hearty and strong—
It hasn't begun to grow old yet, you see,
The noisest thunderstorms don't startle me,
I think I enjoy their rumblings and crashes
Nearly as well as the fireworks' flashes.
There's reason why I should be manly and brave;
The stars and the stripes it's my duty to wave,
For I'm the month in which long, long ago,
This nation declared it was able, you know,
To care for itself; and so on my fourth day
A paper was signed by men whom they say
Were good and true—a paper that said
God made all men free! And that's what the red,
White and blue of our dearly loved flag tries to say
Wherever it waves by night or day,
To all the wide world; and that is just why
They make such glad sounds on the Fourth of July."

Ha. Flag of His Own.

"It seems queer that with all these flags flying around us, the one staff not displaying the American colors should be the fine steel spar on the White House," said a naval officer on a recent holiday, while standing on the east portico of the State, War and Navy Department building, and directly below the big ensign floating from the timeball staff.

"I know that the President is out of town and that is why the flag is not hoisted on this national holiday, but that does not seem to me sufficient reason for the failure to show the colors. The fact is that the statutes require the American flag to be displayed on all public buildings during office hours, and it is a question in my mind whether that law is not being evaded in the case of the White House.

"Of course it is desirable to indicate the presence or absence of the chief executive from his home, but that could be accomplished in a much better way and by recourse to the simple expedient of allowing the President to use his own flag to indicate his movements. That is what an admiral does aboard a ship—one can always tell from shore whether he is aboard his flagship or not by the presence or absence of his own pennant from the mast end or signal arm.

"Now perhaps it is not generally known that the President by law and regulation is authorized to fly his own flag, and a very beautiful flag it is, a blue silk field bearing the splendid crest of the coat of arms of the United States in the corner and heavily bordered with gold. Of course these details could be modified to suit service conditions and make the flag stand rough weather, but the President certainly should show his flag. And the best way to do this would be to have the American flag hoisted over the executive office buildings daily regardless of the President's whereabouts, indicating its national character, while nothing should be flown from the steel staff on the White House but the President's blue flag when he is under its roof."—Washington Post.

Making Firecrackers.

"When I was in China I used to see them made," said C. M. Yest of Minneapolis. "The firecracker has been in use there a few thousand years. Few people outside of China know the method of manufacture. The straw paper is first rolled by hand around an iron rod, which varies in size according to the size of the cracker to be made. To complete the rolling a rude machine is used. This consists of two uprights supporting an axle, from which is suspended by two arms a heavy piece of wood, slightly convex on the lower side.

"There is just room between this swinging block and the top of the table to place the cracker. As each layer of paper is put on by hand, the cracker is placed upon the table and the suspended weight is drawn over the roll, thus tightening it until no more can be passed under the weight. For the smaller 'whip' cracker the workman uses for compression, instead of this machine, a heavy piece of wood fitted with a handle like that of a carpenter's plane. In filling crackers 200 or 300 are tied together in a bunch.

"Red clay is spread over the end of each cracker with a punch. While the clay is being tampered in, a little water is sprayed on it, which makes it pack closer. The powder is poured in the other end of the cracker. With the aid of an awl the edge of the paper is turned in at the upper end of the cracker, and the fuse is inserted through this. That is the way the Chinese make them. In China they can be purchased at a cost of 82 cents for 10,000, although the best quality commands twice that price."

What a Calf Did.

In a Delaware village some joker notified a merchant by letter that his store was to be robbed that night. He at once hired three men to arm themselves and pass the night under a shed near the store. If the robbers came the men were to rush out and either capture or shoot them down.

About midnight, when all was quiet and when the watchers had begun to doze, a calf jumped out of a yard and came clattering and bellowing down the street. It was thought the robbers had come, and then men rushed from the shed and opened fire.

They killed the calf, and one of their bullets entered a window and wounded a sleeping woman, and the whole village was aroused before it was discovered that a spotted calf was to blame for the whole thing. The watchers who made the mistake are being laughed at so much that they hardly dare leave their homes. They are known as "the calf-shooters," and it will be a long time before they look for other robbers.

The Daylight Moon.

Miss Corliss Babson, the champion woman high jumper, is very fond of children, and at a tea at Vassar the other day she repeated a quaint child's saying.

"I was walking in Gloucester one morning with a little girl," she began "and looking over my shoulder I saw the moon—large and round and pale, as it is often seen—in the bright blue sky.

"'Oh, look at the moon,' said I. 'The moon in the morning!'

"The little girl looked at it and frowned.

"'Yes, that is the moon,' she said. ''Taint lighted, though.'"

They Said So.

Sunday School Teacher—Tommy, can you tell me what caused the flood?

Small Tommy—Yes, ma'am; it rained.

—

Teacher—What is the meaning of the word "father," Harry?

Harry—Father is a man who always puts gravy on my plate in the wrong place.

—

Fond Mother—Johnny, what are you going to give the little boy next door for a birthday present?

Johnny (remembering a recent difficulty)—I know what I'd like to give him, but I ain't big enough.

—

It was little Edna's first view of an opera gown.

"You ought to have seen Aunt May in her long white short dress," she said.

"Why, dear," queried her mother, "how could it be both long and short?"

"It was long at the bottom and short at the top," explained Edna.

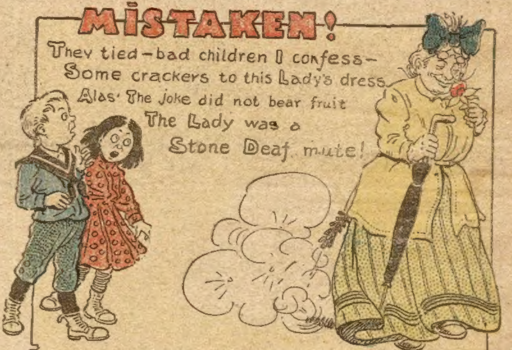
Smart Child.

A little 5-year-old, who was more remarkable for her bright mind than for her beauty, was helpful to her mother, relates the Chicago Tribune. One day she was asked to go to the door and admit some callers, as her mother had not quite finished her toilet.

The little lady showed them into the parlor and sat down to entertain them until her mother's appearance.

'Not very p-r-e-t-t-y," spelled one lady to the other.

"Well," said the little maid, "I may not be very p-r-e-t-t-y, but papa says I am s-m-a-r-t, all right."


MISTAKEN!
They tied—bad children I confess—
Some crackers to this Lady's dress.
Alas! The joke did not bear fruit
The Lady was a
Stone Deaf mute!

A GIRL TO A CAT.

Kitty-Puss, why look so wise?
You don't know a thing!
You can't say your A-B-C's,
You can't learn to sing!

Kindergartens are no use,
Kitty-Puss, to you—
Though intelligent you look,
Just as children do!

Still no doubt you've learned a lot
In your kit-cat school—
Learned how mice and rats are caught
Learned to pounce by rule;

Learned how frolics should be played
With both ease and grace;
How to lap with dainty air;
How to wash your face;

Learned to curl a furry tail,
Lift it high with rage—
Oh, yes, things like these you've learned
From an early age!

So no wonder that you look
Learned, though you're not.
Since of cunning kit-cat lore
You know such a lot!

—Little Folks.

New View on Nero.

During a recitation in history in a Baltimore public school, the teacher once put the question:

"Who was Nero?"

"I don't know exactly, ma'am," said the pupil addressed, a girl of 10. "But I think he's the one they sings about in Sunday school."

"In Sunday school!" repeated the teacher, unable to recall any religious music having Nero as its theme. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you know the hymn, ma'am?" asked the girl, surprised. "'It's Nero, My God, to Thee.'"

Remarkable Boys.

The two most remarkable boys in Kansas are the sons of Mat Ernzen, a prosperous German farmer. These boys, who are only 9 and 10 years old, cultivate Mr. Ernzen's farm of 280 acres, and they do it just as well as the average grown farmer. Mr. Ernzen has purchased riding tools of every description for the boys, and in this way all heavy lifting is done away with. Last spring the boys, unassisted, planted more than 100 acres of corn and cultivated the crop without any help from their father.

A YOUNG PATRIOT'S LETTER.

Dear Grandpa:
Your little boy
Is counting on a day of joy,
The glorious Fourth will soon be here,
So send at once, do, grandpa dear,
A drum so big a mile it sounds,
Of firecrackers fifteen pounds,
A horn just three feet long, I guess—
It wouldn't do to have it less.
I want to honor your old State,
So I intend to celebrate!

—Youths' Companion.

Young Mother.

"Have you any fireworks suitable for small children?" asks the young mother.

"Yes, ma'am," answered the dealer. "We have some splendid firecrackers, roman candles, and all such things."

"But I fear my little boy is not old enough for them."

"Then here are some pinwheels, and—"

"O, the very thing! Have you some safety pinwheels? My little boy is not yet a year old."

JULY.

I'm little July!
Sing ho! Sing ho!
America's birthday I bring.
Wave the flags!
Fire the guns!
March with fifes
And with drums!
And let all your loudest bells ring!

About the Size of It.

Little Willie—Say, pa, what is a fisherman?

Pa—A fisherman, my son, is a man who sits and sits all day—then he lies."